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TEN

DISCOURSES

ON

ORTHODOXY,

BY

JOSEPH HENRY ALLEN.

DELIVERED IN THE UNITARIAN CHURCH, WASHINGTON, D.C.,

1848–1849.

SECOND EDITION.

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PREFACE

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

I HAVE been encouraged to think that there may be a place for these Discourses in our widening missionary field, and present them to the American Unitarian Association for that service. I take satisfaction, besides, in celebrating thus by a new edition the fortieth anniversary of their first appearance.

In several instances the Revised Version of the New Testament has enabled me to simplify the form of statement in this edition. Excepting this, the changes that have been made are few, and mostly verbal. I will add, in further justification of this reprint, the testimony of the late President Walker, who wrote (October 22, 1849), of the last three Discourses in this volume, that they "are especially valuable, and contain the views on their several subjects which alone, as it seems to me, can stand."

J. H. A.

CAMBRIDGE, MASS., April 16, 1889.

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DISCOURSE I.

ORTHODOX THEORY OF CHRISTIANITY.

THIS I CONFESS UNTO THEE, THAT AFTER THE WAY WHICH THEY CALL HERESY, SO WORSHIP I THE GOD OF MY FATHERS. — Acts xxiv. 14.

It is my intention, in these Discourses, to examine several of the principal doctrines of Orthodoxy, so called, and to discuss their claim to our belief and respect. I shall have occasion to dissent from many things taught in the popular Christianity of our day, and to protest as strongly as I can against what I think false and hurtful in it; but I shall hope to do it with proper feeling and Christian courtesy. Our religious belief lies at the bottom of all our belief. Let us deal with it frankly and sincerely,— never shrinking from just criticism, nor refusing to give a reason for the faith that is in us.

And, while I shall examine with the most perfect freedom into the prevalent theology of the churches about us, I trust I shall say nothing in an irreverent and scornful spirit. Firm believer myself in a Christian faith at heart, a Christian life in truth and love, wherein all believers are reconciled to God through his Spirit and his Son, I cannot, if I understand myself, say anything to distress and alienate any

religious mind, or widen the breaches of the Christian Church, or unsettle in any man's mind that fundamental faith. What I ask is a fair hearing from those, if any be here, who differ from me; pledging myself to respect as sacred the sentiment of religious reverence in every bosom, and to perform my task as a high duty which I owe to Christ and the Church. My obligation is first to those who have so long sustained here a dissenting religious body,—to vindicate their position, and set forth the views and convictions which have united them thus far; next, to our religious community, among whom it is the privilege and duty of my office to proclaim the high and animating faith of a Liberal Christianity. It is due to both, to give an account of our belief, and to state the reasons which justify us in rejecting creeds more popular than ours, and sustaining an independent church.

The word Orthodoxy I use neither for praise nor blame. Its meaning is simply "right opinion"; that is, that opinion, or set of opinions, which is held to be right by the majority in any time and place. Its opposite is not *falsehood*, but *dissent*, or *liberalism*, or *heresy;* and it was in opposition to the popular belief, or Jewish orthodoxy, of his day that Paul says, "After the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers." There are orthodoxy and heresy in other things as well as in this; and you will readily recall them in many of our common forms of speech. We apply these terms to what is received and held established, or, on the other hand, novel and innovating: to methods

of art and science; to maxims of trade; to political opinions; to everything where there is a tendency to split into two parties,—the holders-fast and the movers-on, the men of habit and the men of theory, conservative and reformer, quietist and radical, old school and new school. There is the orthodox (or received) creed of democracy, and the heretical. There are old school and new school Calvinists; extreme right and left in every sect; even Unitarian "orthodoxy" matched against heresies without a name.

So the distinction is a very simple and common one, implying neither reproach nor blame on either side, only difference of mental habit. As applied to religious belief, we use the word Orthodoxy to designate the prevalent system of modern Protestant theology,—that which we find in most of the neighbouring churches; that which is sometimes called Evangelical Christianity. This is what I have taken in hand to consider. And my object in the present Discourse is to give as fair and unprejudiced a statement as I can of what it is. One would not spend his time and strength in fighting in the dark; and so, to prevent any misunderstanding, I begin with an exposition of it. The reasons for rejecting it shall appear afterwards.

Of the degrees of forms in which we find it, the first is that of the sentiment and religious feeling simply. It takes for granted the received opinions, and makes them the basis of devotion and faith. It raises no questions, and harbours no doubts. It accepts implicitly what is taught in the creed or

hymn, without scruple or cavil. It finds no difficulty in any of the ordinary religious forms of speech,— no difficulty in the Trinity, the Atonement, the double nature of Christ, the awful penalty denounced on unbelief,— simply because the intellect deals not with them, but only the heart. It finds joy and peace in believing, though it be the most astounding and incomprehensible dogmas. Religion comes home to the faith and love, and wakens no troublesome process of reason. With Orthodoxy such as this, we have no controversy, no quarrel. God forbid we should seek to uproot the affectionate faith of the heart in any one, or tear away from the living vine even the rudest trunk, about which its tendrils may be clasped!

Again, there is the mystic and speculative Orthodoxy, which has got beyond the bounds of distinct and logical thought, and deals with vague conceptions and metaphysical problems, and clothes its fancy in the garb of the popular belief. German mystic and American transcendentalist profess a sort of trinity, and borrow some of the phraseology of Christian dogmatics; but though their creed may wear the livery and speak in the dialect of the churches, it has not the same meaning. The churches disown it; and I have nothing either way to do with it. As I shall, perhaps, have occasion to show in several examples, it is only one of the forms of belief held by many Unitarians,— only one sort of heresy, disguised in the formularies of the Church.

But besides these two, the Orthodoxy of sentiment

and that of metaphysics, there is a third,—the Orthodoxy of sects and creeds. It is this with which I have now to do. I shall deal with it simply as an intellectual system, demanding men's assent, and offering to the intellect its proofs. It claims to be a true account, the only true account of the method of salvation, as shown in Christianity. It claims to rest on Scriptural authority, and to give demonstration from the record for every assertion and every dogma. It claims to be the system or "plan of salvation" existing in the mind of God before the world was; implied in every word of the primitive history of mankind; testified by witnesses from age to age; vouched by the whole vast apparatus of prophecy and inspiration and miracle; displayed in the life of Christ, and declared from first to last by his apostles; the only system safe to believe and know; perfectly and infallibly true; the one and only method by which man could have been saved from sin and the horrors of eternal death; to deny which is to be utterly and forever lost.

I beg it may be distinctly borne in mind, that this system is *all that I have just described*, or else that, as Orthodoxy, it is nothing. There is no midway between these two extremes. Either it is the infallible and only saving truth, or it is merely one out of numerous methods of Scriptural interpretation,—one out of a thousand forms of human speculation. Either belief in it is absolutely necessary to save us from God's wrath and curse, or it has no other merit than as it commends itself to one and another mind seeking truth. Either the most devoted love

to God, the purest self-sacrificing love of man, the utmost earnestness of spirit and integrity of life,—honour that shrinks from the smallest stain, and piety that lifts the soul in sweetest intercourse to heaven,—all are nothing, are a mockery and false show, an ignorant and unacceptable offering, without the addition of this form of faith; or man can demand, and God has enjoined; nothing more than sincerity of mind and integrity of life, leaving the form of opinion to each man's unfettered choice. This or that system of belief it may be a higher privilege to have,—a better basis of character, more conducive to strength and spirituality of soul; but this is not the sort of merit on which the claim of Orthodoxy rests. It allows no comparison, it makes no compromise. It is nothing, or it is all. If I have it, I may trust, humbly indeed, but still hopefully, in the grace of God for acceptance and salvation. If I have it not, no prayer can be heard, no penitence available, no purity of life a ground of pardon or hope, no testimony of the conscience anything but a flattery and a lie. We may live and work and pray and do deeds of charity together, but the grave is an eternal barrier. No common trust, no heavenly companionship, in the world beyond, can be between the heretic and the true believer. To my terrified spirit at the last great hour, to the stricken hearts of my believing friends, there is no hope for me, but the fearful looking forward to infinite anguish and the flames of eternal fire, from the vindictive justice of Almighty God!

Let it be remembered, then, that the system of

Orthodoxy taught in most of our churches says or implies all this, in virtue of what it claims to be. All this tremendous alternative is taken for granted in every argument and appeal. Listen to the language of creeds, and sermons, and tracts, and popular religious treatises, and you will find I have only understated its terrible significancy. Softened down by this man's gentle temper, refined and spiritualized by that man's sweet and devout heart, it is yet by implication all that I have said. As a system it is imperative, absolute. It asks and gives no quarter. To accept it is to share a hope of life. To reject it is certain and unending death. If Orthodox teachers shrink from stating this alternative, they are false to the profession of their creed. Either they dare not confess its full meaning, or else their gentler feeling has compelled them, without knowing it, to desert that creed, and stand upon liberal ground.

Now what is this system of belief, which offers so absolute and haughty an alternative? I shall endeavour to state it clearly and distinctly, without prejudice or distortion, while I trace it unflinchingly to its complete results. Its only merit is as a system. Like an arch, it must be complete or it is nothing. Shake one stone, and it all falls together. It has been constructed and defended by minds of iron logic,— by men who boldly followed out their propositions, step by step, confident of the first principles they assumed, and recoiling at no consequence they were conducted to. We respect their logical consistency, while we dissent from their creed. We admire their intellectual honesty and courage, but

steadily refuse and disclaim the results they reached and so resolutely proclaimed.

The system called Orthodox or Evangelical is in the main that taught by Calvin, and is comprised essentially in six leading points of faith. Many others are included in it besides; but they are subordinate, and will come up incidentally. These make the framework; and each ought to be examined on its own particular merit, while still regarded as an essential feature of the scheme. I propose to take them up, one by one, and consider them in order, with such method and fulness as they deserve. They are: the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, the Vicarious Atonement, Depravity of Human Nature, Eternal Punishment, and the Infallible Authority of the Scriptures.

Each of these six is necessary to all the rest. Without the Trinity, there would be no basis for the system,— no theory of the Divine nature to which it might correspond. Without the Deity of Christ, the system is stripped of its dignity, the work of redemption takes a wholly different meaning, and the whole great scheme resolves itself into a barren juggle of words. The Atonement is needful to the system, because it is the system,— the nucleus, the keystone, the main idea, to which all the rest are adjuncts. The native depravity of man, exposing him to God's just curse, explains the reason why such a work of redemption was called for. Endless penalty annexed to unbelief is the only motive strong enough to command Christ's sacrifice on the one part, or man's assent on the other. And, finally, the com-

plete inspiration of the Scriptures furnishes the only possible test and the only sufficient proof.

As I have said, its merit as a system lies in its completeness,— in its being fully rounded out and compact in every part. It is this more than any other thing which makes its recommendation to a certain class of minds, and which has bound it so firmly in the intellectual habits of a great portion of the Protestant Church. It will be my duty, in respect both to the claims it presents and the hold it has on our community, to examine it step by step, and give in detail our reasons for rejecting it. But first I must give a succinct view of it as a whole, showing how its main features are developed one by one from a few leading statements or assertions; and next submit some general considerations, touching it as a whole and not in parts. These two points will occupy the present and the following Discourse. In these I shall not speak of the proofs of particular doctrines,—leaving them till I come to particulars,— meanwhile contenting myself with a more general and simple exposition.

It will not make much difference what point we start from, so only it be in that circle of ideas. According to the character and habit of our mind, we might begin with the character of God, or the condition of man; with the nature of evil, or the history of the Fall; with the outward proof of misery, or the inward proof of sin, or the Scriptural proof of redemption, or the historical proof of man's need of such a revelation; with speculations on the agency of evil spirits, or on the freedom of the human will.

Either, I say, may be taken as the point of departure, and from either the entire theory may be developed. For its merit, as I remarked, is as a work of logic. Assume either point, and the rest will find their places. Start from any one, and the rest will easily follow.

In tracing briefly the course of reasoning by which the system is held together, I prefer, for clearness' sake, to begin with *the moral condition of man, as viewed by the eye of God.* This, it seems to me, gives the most plausible and tangible point, and leads most easily to all the others. Besides, it appeals, as it were, to the human consciousness of every man. Our theory of man's condition is not like an abstract dogma, requiring laboured proof. Scripture may illustrate it, may bring it before the mind, and may be our final strongest reason for adhering to it; but, whencesoever derived, it is after all our previous assumption, the ground we take to build on: a tacit or gratuitous assumption, perhaps, but one that unavoidably shapes and tempers all our thought on religious things.

I. Orthodoxy, then, begins by presupposing that mankind is in a condition of REBELLION against God, and is exposed to his everlasting wrath and curse. That is, such is man's condition, aside from all considerations of the office of Christ, which is to redeem him and remove the curse. Naturally, by himself, he is capable of no good thing; can make no acceptable offering to God; stands always in need of forgiveness for the infinite wrong in his own soul; cannot trust his reason or conscience, through an innate evil tendency, that warps his mind aside from good,

and alienates him from his Creator. Left to himself, he must inevitably perish. The destiny of unending happiness and advancement, for which he seems to be calculated if we consider some of his native affections and capacities, has been forfeited; and, taking him in his actual state, he is no better than an outcast and a rebel. Besides, being under the government of a Being infinitely just and holy, every sinful act bears the brand of infinite guilt, and is justly visited with an infinite penalty. He may have moral sense to know his danger and calamity, but cannot of himself devise a remedy. With no intercessor to plead before the bar of the offended justice of Heaven, there is no way to reach and make appeal to the Divine mercy. Behold, therefore, man, in his natural estate, at once the greatest and most wretched of God's creation! No certain truth, no immortal hope, no escape from the threatened doom of vengeance, no access to the presence and favour of righteous Heaven!

But how could so frightful a calamity have fallen upon the human race? It is against all the idea we have of God,—against the whole of the account given of him in the Scriptures,—to suppose that he could have designed from the first such a doom for any of his creatures. It would be blasphemy to think he would create beings capable of joy, and torment them deliberately with hopeless and unending woe. The hardiest advocate of God's omnipotent right could not venture such a plea. It would be to confound and abolish every grateful and holy thought of God. It would be to dethrone him, the all-wise

and merciful, and put a malignant devil in his place,—giving the infinite majesty of the universe to the only Evil, instead of the only Good.

How, then, came man into this condition, since it could not have been his first estate? To account for it, there must have been a FALL, which drew down the entire human race,—an original sin of the first man, whose guilt all share in by inheritance. For his sake and in his name earth and mankind were visited with a curse, which no merely human power can expiate. He cut himself off (as it were) by a wilful act from the love of God, and could entail only evil on his posterity.

But the first man was created upright and free from guilt; free to sin, it is true, but free to righteousness. Nothing in his nature *then* enticed him to sin; no fatal propensity weighed on him then, to overbear and paralyze his will. Guilt was brought upon him from a higher sphere of being. He was TEMPTED, and he fell. The great Rebel Angel, who had already drawn away a third part of heaven's host from their allegiance, found man in paradise, where the goodness of God had placed him, and, moved with jealousy and spite that another should inherit the blessing he had lost, plotted his downfall. The simple and credulous innocence of the first pair was no match for the crafty and deceitful arts of Satan. The pledge of Divine favour was forfeited. The fatal step was taken. The forbidden fruit they plucked and ate. And from that hour, from that one inexpiable act, dates the downfall, the rebellion, the misery of the human race. We have no ground to win back

the inheritance they lost. No virtue of ours could retrieve that guilt, or give us a claim to any special favour. And so we are all lost. Though we shared not the guilt, we share the penalty; as from a dissolute and spendthrift father is left but a heritage of beggary to his child.

And this is not the whole story of that loss and fall. For by that act man has deliberately renounced his allegiance to God, and surrendered himself to Satan, the enemy of God. Hence the dominion of evil spirits, and the whole array of Satanic agency. Evermore we are beset with a host of spiritual foes. The great Adversary himself, with power and energy only less than God's, is perpetually seeking to draw men farther away from him. Every temptation to desert our better purposes, every whispered thought of sin, every feeling of envy and malice, every enticement of sensual pleasure, is part of that terrible system of treachery, or ambuscade, or open violence, by which the infernal spirit seeks to confirm his power. Through his evil influence men turned of old from serving the true and only God to worship idols or devils. By him was set in motion that fearful tide of crime, the lust, and falsehood, and revenge, and craft, and enmity, that have ravaged and made waste the earth. And without a special miraculous deliverance, we are all bound over, hand and foot, without resource or hope, in bondage to him,—to serve him in pride and folly and wickedness on earth, to serve him in chains and darkness for ever in the world below. Such is man's terrible condition, such his unending doom!

II. But it is impossible that God should look with indifference upon this wretched fate of man. Created in his image, pronounced his child and the head of his creation, God's love yet yearns towards man, and willingly would he deliver him. And here comes in that *conflict of the Divine attributes*, which makes necessary the great redemption by the Atoning Sacrifice. On the one hand, God's MERCY cannot willingly consent that his child should be for ever in this state of abject and hopeless slavery; but, on the other hand, stern and inexorable JUSTICE cannot overlook the fact, that by his rebellion and enmity towards God he has forfeited all his claim upon Divine compassion. Again behold the terrible law of his condition. To God as sovereign are rightfully due all the reverence, homage, obedience, which man can render. Every failure is a sin, an act of rebellion, a forfeiture of Divine grace. Only the most absolute perfect obedience, extending to every movement of affection or thought, and every act of life, could suffice to pay that infinite debt. Thus the best man, naturally speaking, in his imperfect estate must fail to render that service which alone could be sufficient to merit pardon and eternal life; while every least offence, done against the Infinite and Sovereign God, deserves infinite penalty. And so, the more closely we look at man's condition, the more appalling does it become. Seen from this point of view, there is no remedy and no hope, unless some power can be found to mediate between those attributes of the Divinity, to reconcile the claims of strict justice with the pleadings of infinite love.

Here, then, we see the need, and the preparation made, for the Atoning Sacrifice,—to satisfy the two-fold claim of man's *obedience to duty and penalty for sin.* In both he has incurred an infinite loss and forfeit. Some method must be found to redeem this loss, and make it possible that he should be forgiven, —possible, without lowering the demands of the Divine law, or detracting from the honour of the sovereignty of God. For this, only one way is left open; without it, reconciliation is impossible. A Being infinite in essence like God, mortal in condition like man, must fulfil the law and abide the suffering in the place of man, standing in man's stead before the bar of God, rendering a perfect obedience by a holy and spotless life, so as to discharge his debt, and suffering the infinite agony of death, so as to bear his penalty. Only on such conditions as these can the way be open for pardon, and the preliminary steps of man's salvation be taken.

And this course was followed out, step by step, in the life and death of Jesus Christ. The Divine nature put on the garment of humanity; the infinite majesty of heaven was clothed in the veil of mortal flesh. Such from eternity was the constitution of the Divine nature, that one part or "person" of the threefold Deity was foreappointed to this office, and by miraculous birth dwelt in the form of the Son of Mary. Exposed to the attacks of Satan in the scene of the Temptation, he vindicated his Divine nature by his victory. By a pure and spotless life he fulfilled the righteousness that was due from man; by his miraculous works of love he approved himself the

express representative of God's attribute of mercy; by his voluntary sacrifice he made his obedience complete, and loosed for man the chains of eternal death. Then was Satan's kingdom broken, himself baffled, defeated, and overthrown. Madly he had urged men on, till by their hands the Lord of Glory was crucified and slain; and now this crowning act ransomed the human race from his thraldom, and reinstated the dominion and empire of God.

III. Still, as yet the conditions on God's part only are fulfilled. Something more is needed before the merit of this atoning act passes over and inures to the final blessedness of man. Of itself alone it would not be enough. Else it would inevitably follow that, as the sacrifice is all-sufficient, so all are equally redeemed; as Satan's kingdom is overthrown, he can no longer have claim over a single soul; and that all mankind is restored to its first condition of perfect blessedness. Taking the theory thus far, it leads inevitably to Universalism, and is, in fact, precisely the system of Universalism first taught in this country, about a hundred years ago. But here is no room for human duty; no room for personal hope and fear; no motive impelling a man to one or another course of belief or practice. One further point remains,— man's share in the work of reconciliation. The condition has been fulfilled on one side; it must be on the other also. God has done his part; it remains to consider what man must do.

Repentance, obedience, faith,— these are the sum of the conditions required. The words are easily

spoken; but how is the process they signify to come about? How shall man, bound as he is in vassalage to sin and Satan,—how shall he repent? How shall he obey, whose flesh is weak, whose passions are strong, whose conscience is gross and seared? How shall he believe, whose mind is clouded in ignorance and fettered through unbelief? How, in other words, is man, the slave of Satan, to find himself free, rejoicing in the glorious liberty of the children of God?

This great change in man's heart, the change from darkness to light, from anarchy to peace, is more than a partial change of feeling, or habit, or outward acts. It is a change of the entire man, a new birth, the great spiritual fact of REGENERATION. It comes, not by man's act, but by God's good grace. The Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier and Comforter, the third person in the Divine nature, takes possession of the heart, works the conversion of the soul from sin to righteousness, from death to life; and of this new, regenerate state, repentance, obedience, and faith are but the natural accompaniment and fruit. It is God himself, resuming possession of the soul that had been lost to him. Human agency is lost and swallowed up in the Divine. Before this process man can do nothing for himself, scarce offer the petition of agony and despair. He must cast himself on God and wait. The Spirit is adequate to his own work, and human interference is a profanation and offence.

But not all does God thus choose and save, or we should fall back on the same difficulty we found

before. Infinite in knowledge as absolute in power, He foresaw from the first and predestined those who should be ELECTED to everlasting life. His Divine will overshadows and neutralizes the human will. Whom he would he ordained to life; whom he would he left subject to death. Thus we find ourselves again led on, through the unrelenting course of argument, into the drear and chilling region of abstract speculation. Man's agency has disappeared, and become as nothing. The sacrifice has had its efficacy for those ordained and elect to eternal life; but for all others God's inexorable justice holds its steady course. The mansions of heaven are filled with those whom his prevailing spirit has wrought upon to conversion, regeneration, and faith; while for innumerable others, who have not heard the word, or hearing believed not, there remains the same unremoved, unexpiated doom, pronounced first on all the race of man.

I believe that, in this rapid sketch, I have accurately traced the course of thought which makes up the Orthodox theory of Christianity, properly so called. I have endeavoured to do strict justice to its logical merit, not to overstate its several positions, and to show the close dependence of each part on all the rest. I have endeavoured to state it in all its method and plausibility; to adopt for the time the tone and way of thinking of those who sincerely hold it; and to trace, step by step, its several connected portions. And it has seemed indispensable thus to set it forth in its completeness as a whole. As I think, and have before said, we must take it all

or none. It stands or it falls together. You cannot take its parts at option, omitting what you choose. Except, perhaps, the doctrine of Election, and the annihilation of man's free agency, with which it closes,— which yet has a close connection in intrinsic character with the rest,— there is not a part, not a phrase, that is not linked in by that iron and inexorable chain of logic. Grant to any one part the strict dogmatic interpretation, and the rest follows by compulsion. The lost and rebellious condition of man; his estrangement from God by the machinations of a malignant spirit, and the forfeiture of his birthright; the conflict between the Divine attributes, justice and mercy; the need of an infinite atoning sacrifice; the significance of the life and death of Christ; the indispensable work of supernatural regeneration, by which the mind is turned to God; their election to eternal life, and the final rejection of those in whom this process has not taken place,— all are essential parts and features in that system of thought, all are elements needful in the plan of salvation so understood and held.

As I have remarked before, it is not so much the particular opinions held, as the tone and character of the thought, that mark the creed of Orthodoxy. It is comparatively of little consequence what particular theories are held, as the honest and frankly spoken opinions of serious minds. It is not simply as two contrary systems of doctrine, that Orthodoxy and Liberalism are set so widely apart, but as different and radically hostile methods of regarding the Divine government and the conditions of spiritual

welfare. It belongs to my next lecture to set forth my general objections to the system I have now been exhibiting. At the present time, my only object is to show its true character, that we may know beforehand what it is we are passing in review.

The one characteristic of Orthodoxy, beside which every other feature is subordinate and insignificant, is, that it professes to be the ONLY system of belief by which a man can be saved. Every other claim is lost sight of in the astounding grandeur of this one. It may, if true, be a more accurate account of man's religious experience; it may throw a broader light on the course of God's providential government, and the mysteries of man's moral nature; it may better explain the motives from which men act, and the reasons of crime and suffering in the world; it may be better calculated to heighten our reverence towards God, and so subdue and spiritualize our minds, than any other theory that could be framed. But all this is absolutely nothing beside its great and absolute claim, as the only condition by which man could or can be saved. In all the resources of God's power and mercy, there was no other way possible to rescue us from death. In all the fertile expedients of the human mind, in all the testimony of the living conscience, there is absolutely nothing else that can bring us into communion and favour with the Infinite.

Let this, its absolute and imperative claim, be constantly borne in mind. Let it be remembered, also, that its parts stand or fall together, and that a breach in any portion of the evidence is equivalent

to a dissolution of the whole; and then let us seriously address ourselves to the task of a thorough and patient examination of it. And if, as I shall hope to show, it proceeds from a false theory, and is sustained by defective proof; if it wrongly represents the design and purport of the Christian Scriptures; if it contravenes the majesty and the mercy of Almighty God; if it affronts our best reason, and conflicts with our purest affection; if it falsely sets forth the condition of our earthly life, and opposes our best and divinest aspirations in reference to the life to come; — if it does all this, while it cannot claim support from the words of Christ, or from anything we authentically know of the purposes and works of God, then let us not fear, in a candid and truthful spirit, to set it aside for a form of faith more congenial to our mind. Let not the accidental associations of holy memory, let not the persuasions of prejudice and habit and worldly influence, deter us from the sacred duty we owe to God and truth, to examine freely whether these things be so, and from offering the only acceptable gift, of hearty conviction, of sincere and manly thought, of an enlightened, and reverent, and confiding faith. Harbour no intellectual dishonesty and self-deceit. Tamper not with the clear and honest conviction of your mind. Examine every proposition fairly, and do not refuse to acknowledge the conclusion to which you are fairly brought. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

DISCOURSE II.

GENERAL OBJECTIONS TO ORTHODOXY.

THEY RECEIVED THE WORD WITH ALL READINESS OF MIND, AND SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES DAILY, WHETHER THOSE THINGS WERE SO.—Acts xvii. 11.

In the previous Discourse I attempted to give an account — necessarily brief and imperfect, but candid and essentially correct — of the system of Orthodoxy, as held in substance, though variously modified, in the churches called Evangelical. It is my purpose now to present, in a brief and general outline, the principal objections which, to my mind, lie against that theory as a whole. Let it be understood that this discussion is wholly independent of the particular evidence brought in support of particular points. It has to do only with the system as such, and takes in only those *previous questions*, the right answer to which will incline us towards one or the other side. Every person has some bias, coming from his education or way of thinking generally; and no one can probably look at any argument with perfect and absolute impartiality. I freely acknowledge this bias in my own mind, as to various systems of theology. I confess that I feel insurmountable

objections, in the nature of the case, which make it impossible for me to approach the evidence of certain doctrinal points, touching my moral condition and spiritual welfare, as I would a chain of reasoning in pure mathematics. There are previous considerations, which affect the weight of proof on either side; and therefore, before coming to the proof, it is right that you should be aware of those general objections to the scheme under review which to me are anterior to any proof, and stronger.

You will readily recall the train of thought by which we were guided through the circle of Orthodox belief: — 1. Man's condition naturally is one of Rebellion, alienation, and hostility towards God,— having been seduced from the innocence of his first estate by the machinations of the malignant spirit, the enemy of God, to whom his allegiance has been transferred. 2. To rescue him from his lost condition, to make up the arrears of his defied and neglected duty, and to save him from the awful penalty of his rebellion, there is needed an Infinite Sacrifice, — God assuming the form of humanity, so as to fulfil the required righteousness, endure the merited punishment of guilt, and reconcile the claims of justice and mercy in the Divine nature, and thus let man go free. 3. In order to prepare the soul of man to receive the benefits of this atoning sacrifice, there must be a Conversion or Regeneration, brought about by the immediate operation of the Divine Spirit, exercised irresistibly on those (the *elect*) who from eternity have been ordained to life; the rest (the *reprobate*), to endure endless misery.

So far, we have not been inquiring into the truth or falsity of the doctrine, but only attempting to see what it is. And, looking at it as a system, we cheerfully acknowledge that it has considerable merit and plausibility. In the first place, it seems to be very complete and full; to have an answer ready for every exigency; to deal with things in a systematic and orderly method; to comprehend the entire circle of providential action, so far as we are concerned in it; and so to give a precise, clear, and consistent account of every relation towards God, man, and the future world, in which we can possibly be placed. I do not say it is satisfactory; but it is certainly consistent with itself. Its merits in that regard are very great. It has herein a great advantage over its opponents. Like a disciplined and compact body of troops, it can bear up long against the uncertain and irregular assaults of a vastly greater number, having no defined system of operations and no common end in view. It has the advantage, too, of being an established and developed form of faith. Very few even of the single minds opposed to it have an equally definite and consistent theory to supply its place, or can pretend to answer the same order of questions with equal positiveness; and, taking any number of them together, their efforts seem disjointed, feeble, and clashing with one another, beside the precise and orderly movements of those thoroughly marshalled in its defence. The advantage thus gained may be more apparent than real, as I shall endeavour to show presently; but as

an apparent and temporary advantage it is certainly very great.

And, in the next place, it undeniably comes home to the religious sensibilities of men. As I shall attempt to show hereafter in several examples, it probably grew up, in a great degree, step by step, out of the strongly roused devotional feeling, exaggerated by temperament or various excitements, and extravagantly expressed in hymns and prayers; and from these it was transferred or translated into the language of creeds and dogmas and intellectual propositions of belief. This much is certain, and should always be admitted in speaking of it,— that it does at each several point meet and gratify a certain state of the religious sensibility. In the warmth of devout feeling, we adore the infinite majesty of God, so remote from our misery and sin; the conscience is stimulated by the contrast to reproach us with a greater guilt than our own acts have brought upon us, even that inherited from the founder of our race; aware of our besetting moral peril, we tremble at the deceits and temptations of an invisible spiritual foe; we appeal to God's mercy, while we confess our own unworthiness; we acknowledge gratefully the mediating agency of Christ, appealing to our better nature and reconciling us to God; and even his death, endured for our sake, seems not too great a sacrifice to infinite justice, to redeem us from the deserved punishment of our guilt; even the penalty of torture, unending and infinite, seems not too great to avenge the ingratitude and wrong with which our sensitive conscience reproaches us. Now

all these are conditions of mind growing out of the strong action of our devout sensibility. It is not the best and most healthful action of that faculty. It is far below that condition of cheerful, trustful piety, which looks up to God without terrour, and confides itself, childlike, to the sovereignty of infinite love. It is, as I think, an exaggerated and morbid state of mind, but one by no means unnatural. I have heard persons far from Orthodox in their belief speak in the tone of that sentiment, and seriously accuse themselves of deserving the penalty of eternal misery. And we should overlook one of the chief sources of the power of Orthodoxy over the general mind, if we failed to see how exactly it meets, at each point, that roused and strained condition of the religious sentiment, and gives full play and gratification to the spirit of self-accusation and implicit surrender to the disposal of the Infinite, so characteristic of a religious mind.

One other point, that we may stand perfectly fair towards every one when we come to the main argument. I disclaim explicitly any jealous or hostile feeling towards those of another form of faith. Some, I know, have been imbittered and alienated by harsh conduct, bigotry, misunderstanding, shown towards them by theological opponents; and in their case personal feeling has mixed itself with the preference one naturally has towards a faith congenial to himself, and mingled some rancour with their objections towards a different faith. To these unfortunate collisions I have never been exposed. It is not only my earnest desire to avoid all such

sources of prejudice, but it would be impossible for me to feel them very strongly. Not only have many of those to whom I have felt the strongest affection and respect inclined towards the form of faith which I oppose,— not only do I cherish the most unfeigned admiration for the lives and labours and Christian excellences of devoted men, who have lived and live now in implicit and reverential submission to it, finding in it their strength in toil and their hope of heaven,— not only do I regard with sincere and admiring gratitude the indefatigable labours of missionaries, and teachers, and messengers of charity, who have planned, and organized, and carried on many a scheme of Christian enterprise; but sacred and intimate communion in various scenes of the religious life, the counsel and sympathy of sickness, the prayer of fraternal faith at the death-bed, participation in the same solemn public services of religion, have all operated to keep me from blind and wilful prejudice, and, while I dissent from the creed, to make me feel kindly towards those who hold it. I look on this religious theory simply as appealing to my intellect, and claiming my assent. Wholly aside from any personal feeling towards its advocates, I would judge it solely by its own intrinsic merit and credibility, its merit as a spiritual faith, and its credibility as an intellectual system.

Now, after so much admission as I have made, it might seem a vain and idle captiousness that leads me to interfere with men's belief at all. My course in thus deliberately bringing it forward for discussion and attack might seem to require an apology.

And so it would, if we could stop here,— if we thought only of those three points: its logical completeness, its satisfaction to the religious sentiment, and the personal excellence of many of its advocates. But we must go further. We must look at it as it bears on all sides, as it affects our whole tone of thought and feeling on religious things, and especially as it meets the case of sincere and conscientious persons who are thinking for themselves. It cannot be denied that many in the Church maintain but a very lax and vacillating faith; that the creed keeps at a distance many of honest mind, who cannot get over their repugnance to its statements; that many outside the Church find in it grounds of scoff and cavil and religious indifference; that it gives occasion among some for intolerance towards those who agree not with them, or pretence of a conviction more sincere than what they really hold. All this works serious moral harm.

And that, wholly aside from its intrinsic truth or falseness,— wholly aside from the undeniable merits we may ascribe to it. For, from the very law of our intellectual constitution, from the nature of the working of our thinking faculty, when our assent is imperatively demanded, we ask why and how, and demand to know the reason. We become captious and cavilling, perhaps, and our mind is not in a condition to receive truth candidly. To demand assent before the proof is the most unfair way of dealing with the mind. Argument is foreclosed. Candour is made no account of, and set aside. If the inducement to feign belief is strong, some will

become hypocritical and insincere. If the argument is weak, it throws suspicion on the whole class of topics on which it bears. And, more than all, if threats are superadded to the argument,—if terrour is brought in to help out a halting demonstration,—if awful penalties are hinted at for unbelief,—if the inquirer is told that just such an answer he must come to, or else his salvation is lost forever,—it cannot be but that the mind is unhinged, and made unfit to reason. Either one yields, in blind and implicit fear, not to persuasion or proof, but to overbearing and despotic dogmatism, and purchases the hope of spiritual safety at the cost of intellectual honour and independence, or else he despises the threat, defies the doom, and turns his back in anger on those who sought to overawe when they could not convince.

Now, in however slight a degree, qualified by never so many circumstances, it cannot be denied that these effects of make-believe, hypocrisy, and unbelief have been found wherever it has been attempted, in whatever way, to enforce a religious creed. I say nothing of the amount of truth or errour there may be contained in it. I should dread it as much for my own form of belief as any other. Whatever the nature of the propositions, to present them as a foregone conclusion, to anticipate the proof and demand a previous consent, and to denounce a penalty, however slight, on one's failure to be convinced, must work that harm in some one or more to whom such a process of thought is addressed. Such, to some extent, has been the

result in every church that has attempted it. And if it were only a single one that had ever suffered, or were now likely to suffer, in this way, his case would be reason enough and ample apology for the task I now attempt. It cannot be but that, in an intelligent and thinking community, there should be many dissatisfied, and some in peril of their truthfulness and faith, from such demands upon their understanding; and to them I freely and without fear address myself.

What I say will be included in these three main points: — first, objections to the *principle* involved in the Orthodox system; next, objections to the nature of the *evidence* adduced; and, lastly, objections to the *character* of the statements contained.

I. I trust I have already said enough to indicate the inherent and unqualified objection I find to the principle that lies at the bottom of the system of Orthodoxy. You cannot possibly make me believe, — I challenge all the dogmatic theologians in Christendom to make me once admit it to be credible, — that God could make the salvation of any man depend on the acceptance of particular statements in metaphysics or theology, or the authority of any creed or outward institution whatsoever. The objection is unqualified and absolute. It lies not only against the proof itself, but against the entire system and mode of proof. It forms an inherent and insurmountable obstacle, and forecloses my own mind utterly to any plausibility that can possibly be advanced in behalf of such a principle.

I know, certainly as I know my own existence,

that men's minds differ, radically and fundamentally, as to certain points. Whether the difference is innate, or comes by education,—whether it is absolutely insurmountable or not,—I do not care to say. For all practical purposes, it is certainly impossible that there should be identity of opinion on matters of theological belief. My Catholic neighbour finds no difficulty in believing that the sacramental bread and wine are literally the body and blood of Christ; while, to a rationalist, any thing positively miraculous is, in his present state of mind, absolutely incredible. One regards the Divine nature as existing in a trinity of persons; while another will not acknowledge theoretically any other mode of the Divine Being than as the diffused Spirit of the Universe. One thinks of man's intellectual and moral powers as closely bound up with and dependent on the bodily organization, to perish with it unless miraculously renovated and sustained; to another, the human soul is inherently and essentially immortal, so that he cannot possibly think of it as any way subject to decay or dissolution. I do not say that all these ways of thinking are equally true, or equally safe and meritorious, or equally congenial to our intellectual faculty. But I do say that they indicate such a radically different mental constitution in different men, that I cannot possibly conceive or allow that a righteous God should require sameness of belief on any point as indispensably necessary to receiving any of his favour. And this fundamental objection is a matter of principle, anterior to any argument. It applies not to this or that set of

opinions, but to all dogmatic assumptions, and the unqualified requisition of any theological creed whatsoever.

II. But waiving this,— which I state thus strongly so as to bring the principle of the opposing systems into full relief,— a yet more fatal objection lies against the system under review, regarded as claiming authority over the intellect, and demanding assent in the name of God. From the very nature of the case, the evidence for it must be insufficient. Granting it to be true, it can never be proved true. The argument for it must be defective and fallacious, from the nature of the case. For there is no authority to which we can appeal. An umpire or arbitrator, accepted on both sides as absolute and authoritative, is clearly wanted to settle the points of doubt; and where shall we find such a tribunal? where, at least, a tribunal to which we can go as Protestants? I can understand a Catholic when he talks to me about the authority of his Church. I can understand, at least, how that authority, and the infallible inspiration claimed for it, should settle all disputed points among Catholics themselves, although I maintain it to be impossible to bridge over the chasm between that authority and our minds, or to bring any one by pure argument either into or out of that exclusive and uncompromising Church. For here, too, the selection of the authority is part of the very question at issue. But how a Protestant, having once disowned that authority on earth, and declared for liberty of mind and conscience in the interpretation of God's word, can commit himself to

that solecism, that blunder, that defiance and contempt of his own first principles, to assert a creed dogmatically, and declare that a right belief in it is essential to the Christian character and hopes, I do not understand.

Will he tell me that the Scriptures are such an infallible and Divine authority as we require, to make us sure of our faith? But which of the books of Scripture?—for all Christians are not agreed as to the canon or true list of the sacred books. The Catholic Bible is in several respects different from ours. Will he say the Bible as held and read by Protestants? But how does he know it to be literally inspired and infallibly true? By its own declaration? Even allowing that this is the true meaning of its assertions (which I by no means think), it would be reasoning in a circle, taking for granted the very thing we want to prove. How do you convince me that *that very assertion* is infallibly true, and rightly understood? Can the book prove its own inspiration to one who does not believe the book, any more than to one who does not think it says so?

But take it for granted, what then? Whose interpretation of the Bible shall we accept? We know that studious and zealous men, taking very much the same view of Scripture inspiration, have come to very different conclusions as to various matters of faith. If any of them are right, some of them must be wrong. Setting aside our wholly different view of inspiration, I as sincerely think the system of Orthodoxy is not found in the Bible, as my neighbour sincerely thinks it is. And who shall decide be-

tween us? Now that we have discarded the paramount authority of the Church as over private reason, and we find that Scripture reads differently to two different men, equally learned and equally sincere, where is our tribunal?

Shall the test be assiduous study, with grammar and dictionary and the help of the learned tongues? Then what a mockery to the faith of the simple and ignorant! Whose learned decision shall they trust? To which party shall they go,— the awful alternative being life and death, heaven and hell? Or is there no sure belief and salvation for them at all? Away with this cruel mockery of a revelation, to be found only in dictionaries and grammars and library-shelves!

The true test, then, some will say, is the Holy Spirit, interpreting the Scripture record, and teaching infallibly the saving truth. Yes, the interpretation of the Spirit,— God's own voice to us,— we will take that, and that shall be our guide. Yes; but do you claim God's inspiration for yourself, and deny the same to me? If so, your reliance this time is more weak and foolish than all the rest. It is the height of spiritual arrogance, equal to that of the whole hierarchy of Rome, narrowed down to the pitiful conceit which makes one poor mortal arrogate a monopoly of God's inspired word. As if the Almighty should narrow and restrain himself, and whisper to those of one sect or creed the saving truth he arbitrarily withholds from every other! No; we will never consent to this.

And let it be borne in mind, besides, that this

ultimate resource, this claim of the Holy Spirit's own interpretation to the believer's heart, is full as good for one side as for the other. It signifies one of two things. Either it is a declaration of the sacred, indefeasible right of every human soul to trust its own most earnest thought, and confide itself without fear in its search for truth to the guidance of the God of truth, and so is the most simple and absolute liberalism, the very doctrine I am labouring to maintain; or else it is the most arrogant, narrow, domineering, unworthy form of spiritual usurpation, foreclosing argument by the assumption of personal infallibility, and abandoning the whole ground of appeal to any possible authority recognized in common by any two minds. And whichever interpretation we accept, we come round at last to an absolute demonstration of what I said before; that, from the nature of the case, there cannot be evidence sufficient to establish the creed of Orthodoxy, as the only saving faith. No healthy and sound intellect can possibly admit that the acceptance of such a creed, or any creed, should be the ground of acceptance with the just God. We cannot conceive of greater dishonour done to him, than, not only to say that such a scheme was necessary to man's salvation, but then to add that *one must think so*, or be forever deprived of all its benefit.

III. Again; besides the objections I have stated, to the fundamental principle and the nature of the evidence on which Orthodoxy rests, I have further reasons against the character of the doctrines which compose it. I will state these reasons briefly in

order — as they apply, first, to the view of the Divine government; next, to the condition of man here represented; and, lastly, to man's assumed agency in the work of his own salvation.

The view of the Divine government contained in the Orthodox theory — disguise, or palliate, or explain it how you will — is such as we cannot possibly admit, when thinking of the character of the Christian's God, the Merciful and Holy One. It represents him as a Sovereign in the most hateful and repulsive character assumed by petty monarchs of earth,— as supremely jealous of his personal glory, and vindictive to the uttermost in punishing the smallest dereliction from the homage due. And here there is no room for the plausible extenuations we might use in behalf of an inferior sovereign. We cannot speak of the "nature of things" as requiring infinite penalty for guilt done towards an infinite being: for the "nature of things" is nothing more than the expression of his will; and, prevaricate as we may, we must come round to this at last,— that every throb of torture, every moment in the infinite duration of agony (supposed to be merited by the guilt of man), is the special appointment of God, and by him exacted to the uttermost; showing a deliberate, vindictive, I might almost say malignant, infliction of misery, which sets our imagination aghast, and makes us wonder if it is not some fever-dream of the horrors of Satan's realm we are considering, rather than a calm and well-judged opinion as to the rule of Almighty God.

Neither can we speak of "reasons of state" and

the honour of his government demanding such a penalty. It were blasphemy and insult to the Majesty of Heaven, to insinuate any peril of turbulence and anarchy to supersede that beneficent rule. We know that Divine power works steadily, prevails irresistibly. So, by the terms of this creed, it works and prevails on the souls of the elect. Could its energies be expended in inflicting tortures on a "rebellious worm,"— least of all on the plea of danger and anarchy if it were not so? True, this is only half the Orthodox representation of the Divine nature. True, the attribute of mercy is matched against that of justice, and the impending penalty is only the occasion for the display of atoning love. But who taught us that, in the pure and absolute nature of the Deity, there can be such a conflict of attributes, like the conflict of the passions in the human breast? Does any one seriously mean that justice and mercy are at variance,— except, indeed, in the debates and perplexities of our imperfect reason? Will any one seriously transfer that imperfection to the Godhead, and maintain that perfect justice would demand what man cannot render, or that perfect love could consent to the sacrifice of the innocent for the guilty?

Then what becomes of God's wisdom and omnipotence, if his design is thwarted, the harmony of his creation broken up, at the very moment (as it were) of completion, by the contrivance of his subtle foe? Was God baffled and outwitted by Satan, and unable to save his creation from the devastation and wretchedness that must inevitably ensue? Or, on the

other hand (which is even worse to think of), did he deliberately intend a mockery when he gave Adam his law? Did he place him there, with ignorant innocence for his only shield, and expose him on purpose to all the deceits and assaults of the Enemy? Did he leave him at the mercy of such a powerful and malignant spirit, knowing beforehand that he must fall a prey, and appointing beforehand the extreme and frightful penalty? To this shocking dilemma we are brought at once by the Orthodox statement of God's government and the law established over man. We cannot escape it. The alternative is simple and plain. Either, on the one hand, God did not know the peril, or knowing could not prevent it, and Satan triumphed at the expense of his wisdom and his power; or, on the other hand, knowing it, and having ability to defend man from it, he left him unguarded, with the appalling certainty that he would fall, and that no possible effort, humanly speaking, could save him from infinite misery and despair.

Thus, whatever way we look at it, the character of God, as shown in this theory, is full of contradiction and imperfection. Except by a subversion of all our ideas of right and wrong,— by utterly denying the moral distinctions most venerable and sacred,— by obscuring every thing in the Divine nature which makes a difference between holiness and sin, good and evil, God and the Adversary of God,— we cannot get over the radical contradiction. We may cover up one half, and think of him as the personation of avenging justice. We may cover up the

other, and remember only the attribute of atoning love. But we cannot view the Divine character as a whole, without confounding and denying our very idea of God. We destroy irretrievably either his wisdom, or his omnipotence, or his mercy and just dealing towards his creatures. And I cannot look steadily on such a representation as this,— once putting out of sight the amiable and excellent traits in many who sincerely hold it,— without doubting whether I am in the pale of Christian thought at all. No pagan has done such dishonour to his false god as to give him a character like this. Once put it in definite shape, tell it in plain words, and the conception becomes blasphemy,— a parody and mockery of the holy attributes of God. And this objection, I think, is absolutely inseparable from that system of theology which we are now considering.

Nor is our objection diminished by taking into account the moral state of man, as here set forth. For we must accept one side or the other of the following alternative. On the one hand, if we consider him as born into it, inevitably, and in the unrestrained course of providence, then we take the guilt from him and throw it back on God. It is useless to say he inherited it from the founder of the race; for who constituted the organic law which made Adam's sin transmissible to his posterity? Who ordained the system of things in which one's character depends on his progenitors? Or who made the arbitrary appointment, that one who has not sinned should be treated as if he had, because some one else has sinned,— especially when it is

utterly out of his own power to alter his own condition, or to have avoided coming into it? It is no more my fault that I was born a son of Adam, than that I was born at all; and what power is it that imputes his guilt to me? On this supposition, the greatest possible *punishment* is inflicted for the greatest possible *misfortune;* and that misfortune is brought on us by the selfsame Being who visits it with such terrific vengeance!

On the other hand, if we consider that a man's own sin, his own wilful and personal and positive fault, has brought the condition upon him, then the very point and significance of the assertion are lost. The doctrine of inexpiable religion and infinite guilt dwindles down to some general and sweeping assertion about the amount of sin and misery in the world. Now this is not the point in controversy. There may be a vast deal of crime and wretchedness in the world: an infinite amount, to all intents and purposes,—that is, so far as concerns our power of estimating it and relieving it. This is an assertion which I do not care just now to admit or contradict. To my mind it seems exaggerated and one-sided,—a morbid and hypochondriacal view to take of human life. But let it go. All I have to say of it is, that it is not the Orthodox dogma with which I am contending; that it abandons the theological signification ascribed to the fact of sin; that it gives up the whole ground of strictly infinite guilt, and the desert of infinite penalty, and becomes a tame and commonplace assertion, to be judged of by our good sense and good taste, rather than by any theological crite-

rion. Whichever way we take it, it becomes equally objectionable and inadmissible as part of our religious belief. It may be the transient suggestion of an upbraiding conscience, but cannot be the deliberate conviction of a clear, practical, sagacious, and healthy mind.

Lastly, the agency of man in the work of his own salvation. This, in the strict interpretation of the creed, is absolutely nothing. Conversion, regeneration, faith, are superinduced upon him by the irresistible operation of the Holy Spirit. The great turning-point of the spiritual life and destiny is just as much out of his reach to control, as the circumstance of his being born, or being born inheritor of Adam's guilt. And yet, from the very nature of the religious faculty, from the constant testimony of conscience, appeal must be made to him as a responsible being. The whole language of religion would be ridiculous and a solecism, if it did not take for granted his accountability. Man, we are assured, can of himself do literally nothing. And yet this powerless creature, this slave of Satan, this impotent tool of a malignant power, this breathing, guilty, suffering machine, is addressed, is solemnly appealed to, as if by his own act he were drawing down the impending doom of death!

This contradiction in terms no theological ingenuity has ever been able to get over. All attempts to avoid the dilemma have ended in an impotent and barren juggle of words. The alternative stares you in the face. Either man is a free agent, or he is not: if he is, he must be appealed to, to work out

his own salvation; if he is not, it is not his fault if salvation is not put upon him from without. The intellect will for ever obstinately return, and stick upon that stubborn alternative. And how is this alternative met by the creed of Orthodoxy? How is the sensitive and excited conscience, awake to the sense of unworthiness, and trembling at the threatened doom,—how is it relieved, or encouraged, or helped, by any assurance coming from that creed? Alas! only by the most unworthy dallying with words, by the most cruel mockery and discouragement to its sincere and sensitive emotion. I have heard the "sinners" of a Christian congregation solemnly assured that they could not take a single step to secure their salvation,—that such was the alienation of their hearts, they could not even raise an acceptable prayer to God. Nothing seemed left them but utter despair, so far as the creed was concerned. But the more humane spirit of the speaker encouraged them to hope, that, though a *prayer to God* would fall on the unheeding air, be lost in the blank and empty sky, yet a *petition to Jesus* might be heard, and lead the way to the bestowal of holy influences. And this petty casuistry and subterfuge was the only way of escape from the inexorable language of the creed, so as to meet the imperative demand of common humanity. The dogma is barbarous, chilling, horrible. The only refuge from its terrible alternative is in "that glorious inconsistency, which does honour to human nature, and makes men so much better than their creeds."

Thus I have given you the principal objections,

as they lie in my own mind, first, against the principle involved in the creed of Orthodoxy; second, against the nature and validity of the evidence adduced; and, third, against the character of the propositions contained. It will be my design hereafter, to speak more particularly of the argument in behalf of the several leading points. But, in conclusion, let me anticipate two objections which may be brought against what has now been said.

It may be argued, that I am reasoning, not against the Orthodoxy really held and professed in our churches, but against a theory or phantom of it in my own brain, and arbitrarily got up for the sake of disparagement and attack,— in other words, that I do not fairly represent the system I oppose. If any one says this, I put to him the following question. Does the Orthodox creed or church to which you adhere demand belief in it as a condition of salvation, or does it not? If it does, that is the only representation I have made,— the only point against which I have directed my attack. All the rest belong to this; and, for all my argument is concerned, they may as well be what they are as any other. Call it calumny and misrepresentation if you will; but accuse your creed of it, not me. If it does not, then all I have to say is, that it is not the system I am dealing with; and I am glad to find in you another advocate, consciously or not, of an independent faith.

Again, it may be argued that the belief required is not the *only* condition of salvation. A man's creed will not save him, unless borne out by the evid-

ence of his life. So far so good, if a higher standard of virtue is hereby inculcated. But the appalling, the fatal declaration is, that the evidence of his life will not save him without his creed. Do you say that is the very word of Jesus,—"he that believeth not shall be condemned"? Believeth not what? Here, again, will you assume it before the proof? With my idea of salvation, indeed, as the glorious expansion of the soul, the spiritual growth in freedom and blessedness, the life of man in perfect communion with the Father of Spirits, I can see how truth, as the aim of all earnest search, the perpetual reward of sincere endeavour, how faith, as the holy alliance between the soul and God, should be essential to it. But that it should depend—this alternative of blessedness or woe—on the belief of statements arbitrarily laid down, though by God himself, is what I cannot think. And it is this which neutralizes and perverts the declaration, that a life is required in conformity with the creed. The insuperable difficulty is, that the creed should be exacted at all, absolutely and imperatively. Then to demand a good life besides, *according to the moral theory of that creed*, is only to aggravate the burden; double the injustice; superadd another element of vindictive harshness; make the little finger thicker now than the loins before; and whereas men were then chastised with whips, chastise them now with scorpions.

For relief to this, I present the contrast in as few words as possible. The doctrine I profess adheres strictly to the mercy and perfect justice of God; it

does not deny and disparage the claim of human reason, and turn it off with a vague talk of mystery; it does not underrate the claim of righteousness or deny the infinite value of truth; it does not mock and torture the tender conscience, as it strives to guide the soul to God. But it says: Approach him with a glad, courageous, confiding faith. Put off your iniquity, not so much in slavish fear of his vengeance, as for the glory of being nearer his benignant presence. Receive the word of truth with all readiness of mind; and search the Scriptures, the Gospel of Christ's life especially, and "the epistle in tables of the heart," freely, candidly, reverently, whether these things are so. Better partial errour in a free and true spirit, than abstract truth in a slavish, false, and narrow spirit. "God requires not the *rightness* so much as the *uprightness* of your opinions." The truth saves, only through the free and hearty love of truth.

DISCOURSE III.

THE TRINITY.

TO US THERE IS BUT ONE GOD, THE FATHER, OF WHOM ARE ALL THINGS, AND WE IN HIM.—1 Corinthians viii. 6.

IN the two preceding Discourses, I have exhibited the scheme of Orthodoxy as a whole, in the form in which I suppose it to be held and taught generally; and have also stated my general objections to it, as fully and distinctly as the nature of my plan would permit. I pass now to another department of my course, namely, the special doctrines included in that scheme, the nature of the evidence brought to sustain them, and my own reasons for rejecting them.

And let me say briefly, in anticipation, that I do not consider a public assembly a fit place for weighing and estimating duly the whole mass of argument that bears upon the several points. Where the discussion takes the form of debate or oral controversy, the advantage will be on the side of the nimble tongue and quick retort. And even in the more deliberate and grave method of a lecture or discourse, time cannot be given for that study and meditation which a subject of this nature demands. I do not ask you to listen as if it were possible for

me to meet every question, answer every scruple, and take up every doubtful point of proof. I fairly warn you, that volumes and libraries of controversy have been written, of which I cannot pretend to give you so much as the faintest outline; that laborious and thoughtful men have spent often the best of a lifetime in profound investigation relative to some single one of these very points; and that the transition from one mode of belief to another has often been one of the most earnest and solemn forms of personal experience, involving weeks or years of painful study and self-scrutiny, the sacrifice of dear friendships, the perilling of sacred associations, in short, a complete revolution of the whole intellectual and moral state. Such arduous labours, such profound experiences, have been the price at which earnest minds have purchased their glimpses of Divine truth.

Having suffered comparatively little of that sad and distressing passage from previous belief through doubt towards a different conviction,— at least as to these ordinarily mooted doctrines,— I may possibly overlook some points which press heavily on many minds. And, far from contenting you with the amount of evidence in detail sufficient to answer every inquiry, I can only hope, at best, to suggest to you trains of thought, which you may follow out; to present the case as it lies in my own mind, after such attention as I have been able to bestow, and then leave it to your own interest and intellectual honesty to satisfy yourself as to the sum total of the argument. The Scriptural proof, in particular, I

shall be forced to treat rather by masses, and in general terms. The sort of labour needed to appreciate the force of words and phrases in a foreign tongue is one alien to and irksome for such a place as this. I cannot give you the study itself, but only the results of study,— more that of others, too, than mine; and this I can only do with as much fairness, brevity, and thoroughness, as the nature of the case will allow.

My subject to-night is the doctrine of the Trinity, a doctrine or theory of the Divine nature which serves as the basis for the entire system under review,— the intellectual substratum on which rests that whole view of God's providence and human life. Its importance may be judged from the fact, that the boundary of the two great divisions in Christian theology (or, as some would have it, the dividing line between Christian and non-Christian thought) is at this very point; that the Trinity is appealed to in the state papers of many nations, and its name given to a multitude of church structures in every land; that it forms the first article, or the explicit comment, in the creed of very many churches; and that it has been the central topic of inquiry to most of the laborious and thoughtful men who have investigated the great field of Christian doctrine. Where scholars, and wise men, and pious Christians have differed so widely, where the war of controversy has so long and so loudly raged, it becomes us to be modest, patient, thoughtful, in making up our minds. At best I cannot claim positively to *disprove* the doctrine; but only to expose the insufficiency of the evidence on which it rests.

Those who are at all familiar with the history of speculation know that a trinity of some sort has been a favorite formula of thinking, from the very earliest times. The number three has had peculiar attraction for those fond of the theory of numbers. It is the smallest number in which there can be both difference and decision,—a minority and majority; it gives the fewest points that will fix a geometrical plane, or define a surface; and it is found again in summing up the two combining forces (as in mechanics or magnetism) with their result. Speculative minds have, from the first, run very much upon such theories and forms of thought; and accordingly a trinity is one characteristic feature in the philosophy of almost every nation. Thus, the East Indian has his trinity, of the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer. The Egyptian hieroglyphics indicate, we are told, a trinity, taught by the Theban priesthood before the time of Moses, almost coinciding with that of some Christian creeds. The number three is continually repeated in the reckoning of the Roman and Grecian tribes. The Greeks, in their mythology, divided the realm of nature among the three great gods, of the air, the ocean, and the lower world. Plato, the finest philosophical genius of antiquity, conceived of the Divine nature as, first, the abstract, infinite, unutterable Good; next, the active Intellect, or principle of Thought; and, third, the Vital Power, or the force of organic Life. Some of the Jews, and many of the early Christians, were students of Plato, or of his followers; and they tried to express the same thought in the main, by

Jewish or Christian phraseology. One of the schools of German speculation finds a sort of trinity in every force of nature,— making a system of polarities, each with its force, its counterforce, and the confluence of the two; while a well-known French philosopher reduces all forms of thought to the threefold expression, the Finite, the Infinite, and the Relation between the two. A favorite view of man is, as consisting of body, soul, and spirit: the faculties of the mind are classed in the three departments of thinking, feeling, and acting. And, not to weary you with a longer catalogue of triads, Mahomet, who is celebrated for his fierce opposition to any infringement of the bare abstract unity of God, seems to have heard of Christian belief under the spurious form of a trinity, consisting of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Mother!

These illustrations will not seem out of place, when we consider the history and the speculative interpretation of the Christian Trinity. They serve to throw light on that habit or propensity of the human mind, to regard things under this threefold aspect, thus giving a certain theoretical roundness and completeness to the thought. Still, they are by no means a fair account of the Trinity, as held by Christians. That is better seen from the point of view of the religious consciousness. If we analyze the thought or emotion that fills the mind of a Christian man, as he reflects gratefully on the Divine love and wisdom, or girds himself to the solemn work of life, or looks forward with trembling hope beyond the still border of the grave, we shall find, amongst the throng of

confused and mingled sentiments, that three great thoughts stand out in more clear relief, or are fixed so deep as to underlie all the rest. I speak now simply of the religious consciousness, which does not deceive, and is substantially alike in every Christian man. It seems a natural and not a fanciful description of that state of mind to say that it consists in reverence towards the Father, the Author and Source of all; in a sense of personal gratitude and love towards Christ, who, as brother-man, brought the heavenly gift of truth; and in that peculiar emotion or influence within the soul, to uplift, counsel, console, or strengthen, which the heart devoutly recognizes as the direct operation of God's spirit in communion with that of man. These seem to be the three main, perhaps the essential, features of what, for distinction's sake, is called *the Christian consciousness;* this is the sentiment conveyed in those beautiful and universally adopted Scripture phrases, the form of words in baptism, and the apostolic benediction; and it is to this, as to the starting-point and resting-place of the Trinitarian dogma in the religious mind, that I particularly wish to call your attention. You will observe that I am speaking now of no matter of controversy, but only of an experience, or mode of thought and feeling, common to us all as Christians, but differently interpreted, according to our differing philosophies or forms of faith.

Now, simply as a philosopher, I may interpret this form of experience into something very like the doctrine of the Trinity, as it is sometimes stated.

And this is often done,—making one of those transcendental modes of Orthodoxy to which I once alluded. For instance, it gratifies not only my religious feeling, but my metaphysical fancy, to regard God under this threefold relation towards his creatures,—as the Almighty, Infinite Creator, the Sovereign of the Universe, the Father Everlasting; next, as the fountain-head of all spiritual life and wisdom, which have flowed down, as it were, and become manifest to us in the flesh, or in the human life of Jesus of Nazareth, the author and medium of faith to so many affectionate disciples; and, thirdly, as the ever-present Spirit of truth and purity, to plead with the sinful heart, to console the sorrowful, to nerve and animate the soul to the endurance of hardship and the perfecting of its work.

This form of thought, I say, may be grateful both to my religious feeling and my speculative taste. It may give a clearness and fulness to my thought of the Deity, and a reality to my sense of his presence, which I could not have to an equal degree in any other way. It makes what has been called a subjective, or philosophical, or modal trinity,—depending for its proof not on Scripture, but simply on the metaphysical taste and habit of the mind. Not but that the Divine nature is complete within itself, in whatever way we view it; but this is the way in which it is best recognized by my human faculty. I distinctly feel and realize the religious meaning of the Scripture phrase, Father, Son, and holy Spirit. This makes up, in general terms, the sum of my religious thought; that is, as far as the object of my homage

and reverence is concerned. And I am thus full and distinct in stating it, partly because it shows how the *religious* sense preceded the *dogmatic;* and partly because in this we see the exact nature and extent of the true Scripture doctrine, as I understand it. So far we may go, no farther. As an object of reverent sentiment, we closely associate the three; any speculative dogma beyond is unwarranted, I think, by any thing in the language of Scripture, and directly at variance with all we can understand of the laws and processes of human reason.

To illustrate this last point more fully, I ask your attention to the three propositions which I shall seek to establish. The church doctrine of the Trinity is set forth as the foundation and first article of the Orthodox creed; it is maintained to be essential to a proper understanding of the Scriptures, and even to the soul's salvation; it is vindicated as the only theory of the Divine nature which could make the work of redemption possible; it is asserted, moreover, to be borne out and justified by every variety of proof. I propose to show, first, that the evidence for it is utterly insufficient; next, that it has always been held or defined with confusion and contradiction among those professing to believe it; and, finally, that the bare assertion of it involves the mind in an inextricable dilemma between two opposing theories, either of which completely contradicts and subverts the proper meaning asserted to belong to it.

The word Trinity (*trinitas*) * is the exact equiv-

* The real derivation is from the Latin *Trini*, "by threes"; not (as Worcester has it) from *tres* and *unus*. The Greek word is simply "triad" (τριάς).

alent of the English "threefoldness," *i.e.* as a quality of the Godhead; and its meaning as a theological dogma is this: that in the Divine nature are three Persons, or distinct, intelligent, conscious agents, each capable of separate offices and a separate will, each in some sense embodying the full perfection of the Deity, each separately a proper object of adoration, each having his own peculiar share in the great work of human redemption,—so distinct from one another, in short, as to be capable of counsel, intercourse, and sympathy, yet so mysteriously connected, that they form together one Infinite, Almighty, Eternal God. Of the ideas blended and confused in this conception I shall have more to say presently; but this short statement is enough to make the argument I am about to use intelligible.

I. The evidence adduced in support of the Trinity, as thus described, is deficient and inconclusive. Let it be remembered that I am not arguing now about a metaphysical trinity, which needs and claims no other argument except as its own merit recommends it to the mind; but about a doctrine claimed to rest on Scriptural authority and to be borne out by Scriptural proof. Neither am I reasoning now with those who profess (as the Catholics) to take it on the authority of a visible, infallible Church. Their claim does not admit of argument,—at least here and now,—any more than that of those (if there be any) who profess to *know* its truth from the direct teaching of the Spirit. What I desire is to reason with Protestants, candid and serious minds,—with those who profess, in the views they hold and en-

force, to go no further than the sense of Scripture will guide them. Their attention I invite to my statement, that the evidence for the Trinity, said to be so strong, is unsubstantial, defective, and utterly insufficient.

I might begin by alluding to the well-known fact, that many theologians, chiefly of the English Church, have acknowledged the insufficiency of the Scripture evidence, and so have insisted on the need of church authority to establish it. The doctrine itself they would not abandon. It was inherited from the Roman Church, which professes it not from Scripture, but from tradition; and without the paramount authority of that Church, they thought, it must go to the ground. Accordingly, many of this class of theologians have embraced the Roman faith. But I do not insist upon this fact, because it might unfairly warp and prejudice your minds. I only refer to it to show that Unitarians are not alone in contending that the doctrine is not sufficiently sustained by Scripture,— though these, indeed, think it is corroborated and implied there, which we do not. But let this be borne in mind: that the burden of proof rests on that side. Our Orthodox friends offer to *prove* to us the Trinity out of Scripture. What is the amount and value of that proof?

By their own acknowledgment, the doctrine is one, not of direct revelation, but of inference; not explicitly taught in Scripture, but only alluded to, and made out from comparison of various parts. Few persons who have not given particular attention to it are aware how scanty is the Scripture

proof. The word Trinity itself, it is well known, is not in the Bible, and was not introduced till more than two hundred years after the time of Christ, and then, probably, to express something quite different from what we now mean by it. The only passages in the Bible where the three Divine persons are even supposed to be mentioned together are these: — 1. The formula of baptism (Matt. xxviii. 19), "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (or Spirit). This form of words is employed in every church where the rite is used, by ourselves as well as others, without any suspicion of a different meaning than what I before alluded to. 2. The apostolic benediction (2 Cor. xiii. 14), "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all." This is used in Unitarian churches every Sunday: it simply and reverently expresses those three features or elements of "the Christian consciousness." 3. The famous passage (1 John v. 7), "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit." This, in strictness, has no Trinitarian meaning at all, unless the metaphysical theory I spoke of before. It is well known by every critic to be a note or comment, not belonging to the Epistle; it is not found in the Revised Version of the Testament; and any person can see, by reading the passage carefully, that it breaks up the connection of the thought, and spoils the sense.

Besides these three, the only passages I find referred to in an Orthodox article on the Trinity, for

illustration, are these: — 1. "God said, *Let us* make man," &c. (Gen. i. 26.) 2. "My mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them." (Isaiah xxxiv. 16.) 3. "The Lord God, and his spirit, hath sent me." (Isaiah xlviii. 16.) 4. "We will come unto him [the obedient disciple], and make our abode with him." (John xiv. 23.) 5. "Lie to the Holy Ghost; . . . not unto men, but unto God." (Acts v. 3, 4.) 6. "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ" (2 Thes. iii. 5); that is, for his coming at the end of the world, which they thought was very near. These are all the passages referred to, and therefore may be considered as the strongest. Where would one find any hint of a Trinity in these?

The argument then, as most fairly stated by its supporters, is this: — The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are separately spoken of as God, or as having Divine offices and attributes; and, putting such expressions together (like the several partial answers to a complicated equation), we obtain the doctrine, which then becomes the basis of our whole theory of redemption. The argument is briefly answered. Respecting God the Father, of course there is no controversy. As for those passages which seem to identify Christ with God, they properly belong to the next Discourse, where the doctrine of his proper Divinity will be separately considered. And as for those which speak of the Holy Spirit as God, it is quite enough to say that this is no point of controversy between us. We never think, on our part, of the Holy Spirit as any thing separate from God him-

self; only, God regarded in a peculiar manner, as acting directly on the soul of man. Whether we translate the word "spirit," "breath," or "influence," it signifies the same thing; and refers simply to that fact recognized in the religious emotion,— that point of devotional experience and conviction in every Christian soul. And in saying this we have disposed of absolutely the whole of the Scripture testimony supposed to bear upon the Trinity. Thus it is reduced, so far as this branch of evidence is concerned (and we admit no other), to the single question of the Deity of Christ,— to be taken up and answered more fully at another time.

A third point is very important, as further illustrating the feebleness of this evidence. Not only, as you have seen, or may easily ascertain, every single passage of Scripture may be and has been interpreted by the *opposers* of this doctrine so as to conform easily to their views; but, as we are told on the best authority, each single text has been conceded or explained away by some one critic, himself a firm believer in the doctrine. We need not quote a single Unitarian writer; we may confine ourselves strictly to Trinitarian authorities to justify our own interpretations. This fact, often asserted, has been abundantly proved by a volume industriously compiled, in which each passage is taken up separately, and its Trinitarian interpretation set aside and refuted by some Orthodox authority.*

Now I do not urge this point so strongly as some might do, because I know that men professing Ortho-

* Wilson's "Concessions of Trinitarians."

doxy may very often be regarded in their own church as very loose and unsound critics. The fact, no doubt, is worth something; but to me it is not so interesting as another: namely, that the classes of proof once relied on with almost equal assurance have been abandoned one by one, till now only an insignificant number of "proof-texts" remain, to which any candid reasoner is willing to apply. For instance, the plural name of God in Hebrew — once very much insisted on — is completely shown to be no argument at all, the same thing being the case with Hebrew names of magistrates and other titles of honour. The number three — often found in the Old Testament (as in the "three men" who appeared to Abraham, the "mouth of three witnesses," the "threefold cord not easily broken") — and the ascription, "Holy, holy, holy," addressed to God in the Revelation, are no longer held to have a mystic meaning, or to hint at the trinity of persons in the Godhead. The form of argument has very much changed, its scope being narrowed down to the few points already spoken of. And the most confident assertions of the Trinitarian dogma made at the present day (except by those who take it expressly on church authority) are, after all, from the point of view of speculative philosophy, and not of Scriptural interpretation. With the theories of speculative philosophy, except what I said at the commencement of my exposition, I have nothing at present to do.

II. I come, then, to my second proposition, which is, that the Trinity has always been interpreted in the most contradictory and uncertain way by those who have professed to hold it.

As is well known to every reader of church history, the early centuries were full of controversy on the subject of the ideas incorporated in this doctrine; and it was not till "later than the middle of the fifth century" that the final shape was given to it in the Athanasian creed. And this controversy is by no means difficult to account for, if we suppose that the first Christians cherished simply the devout emotion, the living faith, the obedient conscience, and were content not to pronounce dogmatically on an abstract theory they had never heard of. But certainly it is quite unaccountable, if we suppose the doctrine of the Trinity to have been revealed. A single sentence, explicitly said and unequivocal in its language, would have put the whole question to rest, if such a sentence could have been quoted from Christ or his apostles,— which was never pretended, unless in the traditions of the Roman Church. And, if he left his own nature unexplained, except in vague and ambiguous hints which either side interprets easily to its own pleasure, it seems very clear that the more entirely we believe in him, the more we shall be convinced that no such doctrine can be an essential part of his religion.

The force of this circumstance will be seen yet more clearly, when we consider that those first controversies which brought the doctrine into shape were with a very different purpose from the style of argument held now. The "plan of redemption," requiring the vicarious atonement and the suffering of a Divine being, was not the prominent idea,— if, indeed, it was ever thought of,— unless in some heretical,

"Gnostic" theories. To satisfy the speculative tendency of the Greek philosophy, and to vie with each other in doing supposed honour to Christ,— to assign to him (so to speak) a rank in the universe equivalent to the national sovereignty claimed by the Jews for their Messiah,— seems to have been the motive uppermost. The co-equal Divinity of the Spirit was an afterthought, unknown to the Nicene creed (A. D. 325), which (after a full statement of the Divine origin and nature of Christ) says, briefly, "And [I believe] in the Holy Spirit," — which may be no more than the Divine influence on the soul. The Trinity, in its present dogmatic sense,— framed to meet the exigencies of the Orthodox idea of an infinite sacrifice being needed,— I do not think was once approached in the earlier centuries, unless in those schools of Oriental speculation called Gnosticism, which were one and all condemned as heretical. So that we have, as I conceive myself justified in asserting, a total diversity and contradiction, at the outset, between the ancient and modern Trinity,— the meaning, intention, and fundamental idea of the doctrine being quite oppositely held.

And a few words will show the reason of this difference. In the earliest form given to the doctrine, we see the influence of three elements completely foreign to the modern mind,— the vague Oriental theosophy and idea of incarnation of the gods; the Greek speculation, consisting very much in technical distinctions and verbal analysis, wholly divorced from objective scientific truth; and the mystic, symbolic representations of the Egyptian priesthood.

But the last two in particular were not so alien from the scholastic and mystic theology of the Middle Age, and the Trinitarian dogma became thoroughly engrafted on the received creed. Still, as I have said, its meaning in course of time became quite different. The modern dogma retains the ancient form, but interpolates a new significance, and makes it merely the basis of the whole Orthodox scheme of redemption. From a primary, it becomes a secondary, point of faith. The Athanasian creed says, that without belief in it (the highest-toned statement of the Trinity) a man "shall doubtless perish everlastingly"; simply adding, that Christ "died for our salvation," and is to be our judge. Modern Orthodoxy says the Atonement is the main point of faith, — the other being subsidiary, and only essential because of that; while the absolute need of the sacrifice and of belief in it is most explicitly set forth. The abstract doctrine *then*, the reason of it *now*, we find to be the real point of faith. This difference shows strikingly the change that has come about in the central significance of the Trinitarian dogma.

But even among the supporters of the modern dogma there is no more agreement in its interpretation. This was my reason for not insisting more strongly on the fact, that some one or other among them rejects the Trinitarian meaning from each single passage brought in support of it. But this diversity, while it weakens the force of that particular argument, is itself even more fatal to the doctrine. *It cannot be so stated, that the mass of its supporters will accept the statement.* Once get beyond a

few vague and general phrases, which mean much or little according as we please, and which are worn threadbare by use, so as to be not much more than substitutes for thought instead of its expression,— you launch at once into a sea of contradictions. The Church (*i.e.*, the "Orthodox" portion of it) has vibrated from the first between the two horns of a dilemma, grasping either according as there seemed more peril from the other.

The Athanasian creed says we must "neither confound the persons, nor divide the substance"; and one or the other of these two has been done, in every attempt to make a plausible comment on the doctrine. One class of expounders is always accused of destroying the personal identity of Christ, or else of detracting from his true dignity; and the other, of setting up three distinct gods on the throne of the universe,—a notion utterly strange and idolatrous to the general sense of Christendom.

I am not speaking now of the controversy between Trinitarians and Unitarians, but of that among the Orthodox themselves. Some dangerous heresy has always been detected, lurking under the disguise of every possible interpretation; and those have uniformly succeeded best, who have simply stated the bald dogma, in the most paradoxical form possible, and have left the explanation as a "mystery," to shift for itself. Thus in the English Church the debate has been plentifully waged,— South and Clarke, on the one hand, being regarded as Sabellian or Arian heretics, while Sherlock, Bull, and Waterland have the reputation of having even over-

stated the intrinsic paradox, in their bold and zealous defence of Orthodoxy. The Trinity of Coleridge, though he praises these last defenders of the faith, and is even bigoted and intolerant in alluding to his old associates, the Unitarians, is looked on by some with no little suspicion, as a metaphysical, German, half-spurious Trinity, after all, savouring more of Schelling than of Paul or John. The most sincere believers have now and then to protest against the extreme dogmatism and extravagant language of some Trinitarian advocates, while very few would adopt the old test-phrases of Orthodoxy,— such as to call Mary the mother of God, or to say that the Father, or the Trinity, suffered on the cross. The whole tone of declaration on the subject has become softened down from dogmatism, and is tending towards mysticism or metaphysics. And it is not hazarding too much, to say that, if those professing Trinitarianism everywhere were to make a frank and full explanation to one another of what they mean by it exactly, very many of them would find more real sympathy in the views of some heretics or dissenters than in the majority of those in their own ranks.

III. I have but little time or space left for my remaining proposition,— that the Trinitarian dogma involves the mind in an inextricable dilemma between two opposing theories, either of which completely contradicts and subverts the proper meaning asserted to belong to it. Neither, after what has been already said, is it necessary to illustrate this point at any length. Indeed, I may appear to have

anticipated in one way what I am about to repeat in another. In other words, what has just been shown as an historical fact, I wish to exhibit now as a logical necessity. And this I cannot prove, but only state.

I have said that minds of a certain class find a satisfaction in representing to themselves the Divine nature as manifested in three different ways, or modes; and this habit of thought I have called a modal or philosophical trinity,—regarding God in his several capacities or attributes, as Creator, Teacher or Redeemer, and Sanctifier. This way of thinking I have been careful to distinguish from the Orthodox dogma with which it is sometimes confounded; and, indeed, the advocates of that dogma are as anxious as any that one should not be taken for the other. I bring it up, partly to put that distinction in clearer light; but chiefly to show that, in abandoning the doctrine, we do not abandon the religious truth which it may be held to represent. We do not divest the Deity of any of his functions, or remove him farther from the human soul. What seems to us barbarous, scholastic, and unsound, in the language of the creeds, we freely reject. But our idea of God is not as if we took away those attributes of *mercy* and *grace*, or counsel, which are especially assigned to the second and third persons of the Trinity. The Divine nature, in its threefold or manifold modes of operation, expresses to us the entire sum of those ideas of majesty, tenderness, and near communion which have ever been held to belong in peculiar to the Christian's God.

But when we have said this we have said all. This is the only concession or abatement we make in favor of a dogma so long associated with and shaping the Christian belief. We not only refuse it wholly in its dogmatic meaning, but we say it cannot be stated intelligibly, so as to make it clear to our reason what it is we are called on to believe. We can go no farther than the religious or philosophical sentiment, declared before. If we advance a single step beyond, we fall at once upon that dilemma which the best minds in Christendom have vexed themselves in vain to solve, these fifteen hundred years. We say freely that not only it has not been solved, but in the nature of things it cannot be solved. We must either "divide the substance" or "confound the persons." Once get beyond the most vague statement of an intangible and inexplicable dogma, and one or the other of these two we must do. Either we have three gods for one, three objects of worship in every sense, three beings as distinct as Peter, James, and John; or else we simply regard the one God from three several points of view, to facilitate our imperfect comprehension, and our Trinity reduces itself to the harmless, convenient theory which has been stated before. The only relief from this is in a form of words which may mean as much or as little as we please; which says and unsays the same thing in a breath,— interchanging the words three and one, one and three, more like a verbal legerdemain or sophistical play of words, like a riddle or a phrase studied to bewilder and deceive, than like a proposition meant to be understood. We may

say, if we will, that we believe in *the words*, especially if repeated to us on an authority we respect; but if you ask whether we believe *what the words mean*, we must frankly acknowledge that we do not know what that is, and have never been able to ascertain. What has perplexed the best minds in Christendom, and set them at variance, we may well be excused if we refrain from the attempt to solve.

And let us not be put off with the assurance that this is a mystery, which is above our power to comprehend. We know what a mystery is in *things*, and trust we have the modesty reverently to set limits to our intellectual pride or ambition. But a mystery of *words*, as we think, cannot be any thing more than an enigma or puzzle. If you ask us reverently to adore the infinite and incomprehensible nature of God, we readily join with you. If you ask us to acknowledge our ignorance of the modes of his working, even in so simple a thing as the forming of a grain of sand, or the growth of a blade of grass, no less than in the majesty and glory of his boundless universe, it is what, with unfeigned humility, we must always do. It is only when a proposition contradictory or unintelligible in terms is offered us, and our belief of it is demanded under that abused name of "mystery," that we recoil, and say we must first know what the proposition means. With so plain an alternative before us, of two interpretations which we are told are equally false and perilous, we must say that, to our simpler understanding, there seems nothing left to believe at all. It is not true that where mystery begins religion ends; but it is

both true and necessary, that where mystery begins there is an end of human dogmatism,— there is an end of demanding assent to particular opinions and definitions, whether yours or mine.

Such then, in conclusion, is the position in which we find the Church dogma of the Trinity: a doctrine made up of inferences and obscurity; established, by an uncertain and fluctuating majority, in the midst of controversy, doubt, and bitter feuds; resting on scanty and fragmentary evidence; held differently and defended on different grounds from age to age, from place to place, from church to church; constantly liable to the hazard of fatal misinterpretation on either hand; trembling (as it were) always, in its best estate, in that position of unstable equilibrium between two contending heresies, each of which has the merit of being distinct and logical, while it is doubtful whether this has any signification at all that can be expressed in words. I appeal to your good sense and candour, I will not say to pronounce the doctrine false,— believe and think as you will in regard to it,— but to say whether my assent is to be so sharply demanded, whether we are to be exiled and accused of irreverence, and denied the name Christian, because we refuse it.

Its evidence we regard as insufficient and unsound. Its meaning its best friends are not agreed upon. Its statement involves inextricable confusion, and an alternative between two virtual denials of it. Can such a perplexing mystery as that be a test of faith? My reasoning may not show it to be untrue; but so much uncertainty, at least, is shown to rest upon it,

that dogmatism is utterly out of place. Sharing, as we trust, in the Christian consciousness of believers, we do not deny the religious significance which its terms really imply: God is our Father; Christ is our Teacher and Saviour; the Holy Spirit is our Comforter. But not in that vague, mysterious, unintelligible sense in which we are told that these three, as separate, coeternal, infinite beings, combined to make the Triune God. "To us," in the words of Paul, "there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him."

DISCOURSE IV.

THE DEITY OF CHRIST.

IF HE CALLED THEM GODS UNTO WHOM THE WORD OF GOD CAME, AND THE SCRIPTURE CANNOT BE BROKEN; SAY YE OF HIM WHOM THE FATHER HATH SANCTIFIED AND SENT INTO THE WORLD, THOU BLASPHEMEST, BECAUSE I SAID, I AM THE SON OF GOD? John x. 35, 36.

THE object of the last Discourse was to review the doctrine of the Trinity,— its evidence and its interpretation; and to show that, whatever may be claimed for its truth in the abstract possibility of things, yet it never has been and never can be so established as to serve for a sufficient basis to our faith. If what I then said was accurate, the Trinity cannot be used to prove the Deity of Christ; my aim now is to show that the Deity of Christ cannot be used to prove the Trinity. Both are essential parts of the theory of Atonement, which is the key-stone of the whole fabric, the characteristic feature of the whole plan.

The Orthodox statement is this: that Jesus of Nazareth was really and truly God; that the Divine and human natures were mysteriously blended in his soul; that, having existed from all eternity, "not made nor created, but begotten," — coeternal with the eternal God, the personal, conscious agent in the

work of creation,— he voluntarily took the condition of humanity, and became son of a woman; that, for the sake of fulfilling the only terms on which man could be pardoned and reconciled, he underwent the burden, humiliation, pain, and death necessary to the infinite sacrifice; and that, in rising from the dead and ascending to heaven, he was only resuming the glorious state and robes of majesty with which he had been invested through countless ages before. I omit whatever may seem contradictory or out of taste in the representations often made, only stating the essential doctrine in its plainest and simplest form, so as to begin with as distinct a notion as possible of what it means.

Such, in general terms, is the proposition, or series of propositions, which I am to discuss. In many respects, all discussion on the subject must be unsatisfactory. The nature and office of Christ are almost always spoken of in terms which appeal rather to our religious affection than to our intellectual discernment. Partly from sincere veneration or love, partly from a wish not to be behindhand in an essential article of faith, different sects have contended how they should most highly exalt the claims and dignity of Christ. If they have called him the infinite and only God, it has been to make his place and claim paramount, and to enhance the greatness of his redeeming work. If, finding too little evidence for this, they have regarded him as a pre-existent angelic being, a spirit of great power and honour, the first of created beings, the agent in the formation of the world, and only inferior to God himself, it has been

from a shrinking dread of confounding him with the race of men. And if they have held to his pure and simple humanity, it has generally been with a protest first, that absolute freedom from moral imperfection set him apart sufficiently from other men; while his human thought, experience, love, bring him into closer sympathy with us than if he had been of another order of beings, and give him a more genuine, legitimate, and powerful influence on us, as our example.

From this emulation in rendering due honour to the Saviour — so creditable in general to the loyalty and religious feeling of Christians — has resulted a state of mind which makes it very difficult to deal with the plain question of his nature, offices, and claims. In some respects it is more embarrassing than either of the other doctrines. If we speak of the metaphysical mystery of the Trinity, of the confusion of ideas involved in the doctrine of the Atonement, or Fall of Man, of the horrors in the popular notion of hell, or Satanic agency, we have something to appeal to in the common sentiment of Christians. But, when we touch upon the Divinity of Christ, we are on ground appropriate and set apart to the exclusive sentiment of personal reverence; and the most delicate and cautious handling of the argument will scarcely shield one from the imputation of doing wilful dishonour to the Son of God, and wantonly affronting the religious feeling of all Christians.

Still, a service is due to each man's understanding of the simple truth. And, whatever the delicacy

and skill required, however strongly this peculiar difficulty of the task may press, yet — believing that insincerity here is worst dishonour, that an exaggerated and contradictory claim is most adverse to the simplicity of Christ, and, above all, that our whole religious belief is vitiated and confused by error on this point, or any other, when wilfully and timidly adhered to — I proceed to the subject under review. The Deity of Christ is intimately and vitally connected, as doctrine, with a religious system which we hold to be false and injurious, and alien from his spirit. This must be our justification in undertaking a task which to some will appear a studious detraction from the dignity of Christ, and is in some respects alien and distasteful to our own private feeling. And, not to quarrel about terms, I shall generally use the words "Divinity" and "Deity" in the same sense, although this is quite a needless concession, and one which many Unitarians would protest against. It is proper to add, therefore, that these generally insist on Christ's *Divinity*, as belonging to his commission and work, while they reject his *Deity*, as belonging to his absolute and intrinsic nature.

First, however, let me make even more explicitly the disclaimer which I urged in the last Discourse. We leave to the religious sentiment complete and undisputed possession of its own ground. There is a region there with which we have no disposition to interfere. The devout spirit, the experience of prayer, has a sphere and language of its own, inalienable. On that ground our criticism and logic shall

not tread. What the grateful heart recognizes, in its simple, strong emotion, shall remain untouched. The ascription of praise and homage, the personal sense of gratitude, the appeal, the love, the veneration, which the religious mind renders in unquestioning sincerity to its Saviour, we will not refuse or blame.

Neither will we intrude our own interpretation of that sentiment, to explain away this or change the meaning of that. A part of the homage we pay to Christ has become thoroughly blended with the devotional habit and character. Its appropriate place seems to be in the province of devotion. We have no wish to supersede the language or the veneration which has become as it were part of our religious nature,— at least, part of our culture and habit. Only, when it is taken from the sphere of reverence into that of logic, when the emotion is stiffened into a dogma, and the breathed affection becomes petrified in a creed, when the warm declaration of devout feeling is arrested and frozen to a solid shape, and we are told *that* must be our historical or theological opinion,— then we demur, and claim our right to our own better exposition, as we think it, to serve as the basis of the same faith and hope and love.

For the sake of simplicity, I shall confine myself at present to the single doctrine, as I have stated it. The diversity of opinion is so great among those who dissent from it, and the shades of opinion are so many and so nicely discriminated, between the high Orthodox belief and the other extreme of ra-

tionalism, that it would be unfair to take any one person's statement as the alternative, or make the whole various body responsible for his assertions. Towards the close, I may allude again to some of these diversities, for further illustration. I have now to do only with the single proposition, that Christ is God. Of this I shall attempt to show, first, that it rests on the wrong, or at least doubtful, interpretation of a few passages of Scripture, while it is opposed by its general sense and spirit; and next, that, in all the forms in which it has been held, it fails of the great aim of religious enlightenment, while it is unessential to the Christian faith or hope. Its failure, at any rate, to meet the exigencies of the theory of Atonement, will be considered at another time.

I. It will save confusion and misunderstanding, if I begin with a brief view of the Scripture language in reference to Christ. It is not to be concealed or denied, that the writers of the New Testament speak of him in very peculiar terms. In general,—and from this an argument has been derived for the genuineness of these writings,—we may trace a marked difference in the tone and style from the first period to the last of the New Testament history. In the Gospels, our Saviour is scarcely mentioned, except by his proper name, Jesus. If we omit one or two places where the word Christ refers to the office simply, and not to him at all in person, it occurs in all the Gospels put together only as many times as in the single Epistle to the Romans, which is only as long as

the shortest Gospel, and is occupied with a different class of subjects, so having less occasion to mention him. And in every case, without any straining of the words, "Jesus" may mean the man, and "Christ" the office; while afterwards, and among those who (as Paul) had not known him personally, the word Christ tends more and more to become an integral part of his proper name. This circumstance will appear from the slightest examination of the Testament or of a Concordance.

And we see, in general, as in the lapse of time he was more and more viewed in relation to his office, and less in his pure and simple individuality, that epithets of honour came to be more commonly added to his name. The title "Lord"* occurs first in the book of Acts, in direct connection with his name, and is frequently used by Paul. And all the characteristic expressions referring to him (such as "in Christ," "for," "against," "by," "with Christ"), in connection with our religious life and hopes, occur in the later writings of the Testament. They came spontaneously from the grateful and religious feeling of the disciples, which seemed to bring them most near to him. And they acquired that vagueness, spirituality, and elevation which make them seem applicable to God, only after a considerable lapse of time had intervened. Indeed, so strikingly is this the case, that it occasioned serious difficulty to the first Orthodox interpreters; and some of them found no better way of accounting for it, than to

*The vagueness and generality of "lord" and "worship," as the object and act of homage, are seen in Matthew xviii. 26.

say it was necessary his Divinity should be concealed while he was on earth, lest it should come to the knowledge of his subtle and malignant enemy, Satan, and work harm to the truth. The doctrine, as they supposed, was studiously *hidden*, and not *revealed*. It was only an afterthought that Jesus himself had plainly declared it to his disciples,— at least, in the words of our existing Gospels.

A second point is equally evident, and equally important, as throwing light on the New Testament phraseology. It is, that the name Christ (which came by degrees, as we have seen, to be his ordinary designation) signifies not so much his person as his office,— or rather the peculiar and intimate relation in which he stood towards God. The word Christ (or Messiah) means "anointed." At first, and among the Jews, it meant *consecrated to the particular national office of the Messiah;* but by degrees a sense more spiritual and appropriate came to be attached to it, which we may explain somewhat thus. It is, indeed, the sentiment of all spiritual religion, that "in God we live and move and have our being." But most men are conscious of an unwillingness or an unworthiness, which separates and estranges them from him. And the baptism or "anointing" of the Spirit (signified in the name Christ) seems to imply that fulness of the Divine power or presence, that immediate, controlling, pervading influence of the Deity upon the soul of Jesus, which made him, in the reverent affection of his followers, wholly apart from and above the ordinary race of men,— the special representative, so to speak, of our religious

nature and capacity,— the mediator between God and men,— the image or representation of the glory of the Divine attributes, especially of mercy, justice, and love,— in a new and peculiar sense the SON OF GOD. "All are *children* of God; Jesus only is his *Son*." Such was evidently the feeling the early Christians entertained towards Jesus Christ; and they expressed it in a variety of ways, with as much strength and fervour as they could, in those many phrases which have come to be so closely associated with his name.

Nor in this, as I conceive, were they departing from the idea of his simple and proper humanity. There is no break, no abrupt change, no sudden transition, from their first thought of him, as the carpenter's son of Nazareth, to their strong emulous ascriptions of all possible dignity and glory to their risen Lord, — nothing but the gradual progress of their thought, as just described, as he became more and more blended with their religious experience and hope. And, at any rate, whatever was the nature of that relationship to God which they ascribed to him, it was what it were no impiety in them to aspire for, themselves. There might, indeed, be a peculiarity in position, which made him what no other could be to the world and them; but those spiritual gifts which were "the hiding of his power," it was their privilege and their duty to seek. Thus Jesus himself is represented (John xvii. 22) as saying, "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them"; *i.e.*, the intimate sense and blessedness of the Divine presence. As he says, "I and my Father

are one," so he prays "that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." Peter (1 Pet. iv. 14) encourages the disciples in persecution, by assuring them that "the spirit of glory and of God resteth on them," as on Jesus at his baptism; and John (1 Ep. i. 3) says, "Our fellowship is with the Father"; and again (iii. 2), "When he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is"; and again (ii. 20), "Ye have an unction [anointing] from the Holy One, and ye know all things." Paul desires (Eph. iii. 19) that the disciples "might be filled with all the fulness of God"; and Peter (2 Pet. i. 4) says the Gospel promises are given, "that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature,"— thus applying to the disciples generally almost the very phraseology which Orthodoxy applies to Christ, and using in this connection the strongest expressions that can be quoted to prove his absolute Divinity.

One other expression has given peculiar difficulty to interpreters, but seems easily explained, as containing a slight modification of the same idea. It is the title *Logos*, or Word, as used in the first chapter of John. I cannot go into an exposition now of the style of philosophy which made such expressions easy and familiar once, obscure as they may be now. Nor is this at all necessary. Though the expression be a technical one, the thing expressed is a simple religious sentiment or idea. It is enough to say, that this form of speech was naturalized among the Jews in Egypt about the time of Christ; and that

the introduction to John's Gospel (we are told) can be matched word for word, except where Jesus is personally spoken of, out of the writings of these Jews. As we shall see by careful attention, every other explanation is confused and obscure, except that which makes the "Word" signify simply the active spirit or energy of God; or rather, the *utterance* or *expression* of God in his works, and especially in the soul of man. The phrase occurs more than sixty times in the Old Testament, often with a kindred meaning; as in this passage: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth"; besides (a similar idea) where it is said, "God spake, and it was done," &c. Its signification is almost identical with our word "inspiration," taken in the broadest sense; and it may be regarded as a refined, less material, way of speaking of the acts of God.

And if we understand it simply of the Divine spirit, energy, reason, or creative word, we shall find its meaning clear and plain enough. It is that Divine power or wisdom, manifest in the works of creation and in the soul of man. And because that Divine spirit was especially manifest in the life of Jesus, and this was felt to be, in a special sense, a *moral revelation* of God, therefore this phrase is used to introduce fitly the story of his life, and prepare us to understand his marvellous influence on all who knew him. So far as there is a consecutive train of thought in the passage, it seems to be, that God has made a threefold revelation or expression of himself; namely, of his *power* (in nature), his *wisdom* (in the soul), and

his *love* (in Christ); or, as we should say, by his Providence in nature, in history, and in the life of Jesus. A moral revelation *could* have been made only in such a life; which accordingly stands to us as the representative or declaration of precisely those attributes which seem least clearly revealed in the other manifestations of the Infinite. After speaking of the great work of creation, done by the wisdom, energy, or creative word of God,—the Almighty himself, and no inferior being, for "the Word was God,"—and alluding to its manifestation in the soul of man, and his spiritual or providential history, the writer goes on to say: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth." To one who enters at all into the spirit of that Gospel, or understands, however faintly, the sentiment of affectionate veneration the disciples felt towards Jesus,—who first had opened their eyes to the glory of God's creation, and made them aware of their spiritual destiny and the abiding presence of God,—there will seem no serious difficulty in the religious understanding of such words as these.

After this exposition of the general tone and spirit of the New Testament language in respect to Christ, there will be little difficulty, I apprehend, in the few passages that have not already been considered. I mention them more to show their scanty number, and the slenderness of evidence for any thing more than has already been shown respecting the honours paid to Christ in the Testament, than for any weight they have in swaying our opinion.

In the Hebrew Scriptures there are two passages which have an accidental connection with this argument.— 1. Isaiah vii. 14, where the name "Immanuel" is applied to the expected Jewish prince, or some other child, meaning "God with us,"—as Elijah signifies "God the Lord," and Israel "Prince of God," and Timothy "Glory of God." There is nothing in the passage to make us suspect its referring to Christ, excepting that it is gratefully quoted by Matthew, to illustrate the new deliverance through Jesus.— 2. Isaiah ix. 6: "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father." Of course this could not mean Jesus,—for the name given is the Father, not the Son, and the best critics are agreed in applying these titles of honour to the triumphant reign of the pious and prosperous Hezekiah; and it was not till comparatively late, that it was even suggested that they might be said of Christ. It is plain to see, by the connection, that they were spoken of a temporal and warlike prince, not of a spiritual teacher.

In seven places of the New Testament, and only seven, the name God has been asserted to be given to Jesus. Of these, two are set aside by the critics as not belonging to the true text, viz.:— 1. Acts xx. 28, "The church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." It should be (say the American Revisers) "church of the Lord," or "master." The phrase "blood of God" is abhorrent to Christian feeling, and was not used till the ninth century, midway in the Dark Ages.— 2. 1 Tim. iii. 16, "God was manifest in the flesh,"—a phrase easily enough

explained by what has just been said of the Word, as the declaration or manifestation of God; but the Revised Version gives it "he who."

Three others depend on grammar and punctuation, and are as easily rendered one way as the other. These are: — 1. Rom. ix. 5, which can be rendered in several ways: perhaps the simplest is, "Christ came, who is above them all; God be blessed for ever"; or, "God who is over all be blessed for ever."— 2. Heb. i. 8, which is quoted literally from the Greek Alexandrian translation of the Old Testament (Psalm xlv. 6). The Hebrew is, simply, "Thy throne GOD for ever," and has been variously rendered "*is* God," "*O* God," or "*of* (*i.e.*, established by) God." It was addressed to some Jewish king, on his marriage with a foreign princess.— 3. 1 John v. 20, "This is the true God, and eternal life,"— which may or may not refer to Christ, just as we choose, not even being in the same sentence where his name is mentioned.

Our seven texts, then, are reduced to two,— absolutely the only ones with which Unitarians find any difficulty; and that difficulty is only as to the frame of mind in which they were said or written.— 1. John xx. 28, where Thomas, in his excitement and surprise at recognizing Jesus, says, "My Lord and my God!"— as if a man in that state of mind, who the minute before had declared his entire unbelief of Jesus' resurrection, could be the chief witness to the most momentous truth of the Gospel! Some suppose it is an ejaculation addressed to God, as if calling him to witness his new faith; others, that the word is addressed to Jesus in the qualified sense in

which it is used in my text: "He called them gods unto whom the word of God came." Either way, it is of too trifling value as evidence to create a doubt or justify a controversy.— 2. Last of all, and certainly most difficult, if we wish to know the precise shade of meaning implied, is the passage (Phil. ii. 6) which says of Jesus, that, "being in the form of God, he thought it not robbery to be equal with God." It is in the course of an exhortation to Christian humility. We are to be like Christ in this respect. What! in aspiring to absolute equality with God? Certainly not; but just the opposite. As the Revisers explain the verse, "he counted it not a thing to be grasped" to be equal with God,— *i.e.*, to claim divine honour, such as was given to Greek heroes and Roman emperors. Paul was writing to *Greeks* under the *Roman* rule; and it is thus that he contrasts the impious ambition of their pretended gods and heroes with the simple majesty of Jesus, who "godlike" as he was ("in the form of God"), never aspired to that sort of worship from his followers which their superstitious devotees claimed for them.

These are *all* the passages ever supposed to name Christ as God. Of the expressions, "Lord," "worship," "fulness of God" in him, I have spoken already. If he says, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," on the Trinitarian interpretation it would certainly be to "confound the persons," and make no difference between Father and Son. He evidently means, that in the human qualities of dignity, mercy, love, we see all we can see of God, and

have only to add the infinity of the Divine nature to the beauty of the spiritual traits. The only other passage of any moment is that (Col. i. 16) where it is twice said, "All things were created by him." The prepositions used are by the Revisers translated "in" and "through,"—which materially alters the sense, and takes it quite out of the range of doctrinal disputation. It would be out of place here to expound the idea of the creation given in this passage: its proper parallel is found in what has already been said (p. 80) of the creative Word.

I have taken up these "proof-texts," as they are called, one by one, to show in detail what I asserted in general,—that the doctrine of the Deity of Christ rests on a false, or at least doubtful, interpretation of a very few passages, and is opposed by the general sense and spirit of the Testament. Not that these critical discussions have any weight in influencing my own belief; but they are necessary to avoid misunderstanding, and to interpret special points into conformity with the whole. Nor that I contend for the precise expositions I have given them; of course, our particular interpretation is shaped by our general belief, and not the reverse. Critics equally learned and candid will read such things differently. If the Deity of Christ could be proved *on other grounds*, doubtless these passages might be so explained as to accord with it. But this is the very thing which cannot be proved. I do not see how any one can doubt that the sense and spirit of the Testament *generally* make Jesus wholly different from God. There seems (saving the few doubtful sentences) no

confusion, no room for varying opinion. And, indeed, the only real reluctance to regarding Christ as a "mere man" (as is sometimes depreciatingly said) comes, I think, from the morbid and false view of human nature studiously fostered by the prevalent theory of Christianity. This I shall have occasion to review presently; at present, it is enough to allude to the simple fact.

Take the attributes we ascribe to God, and see how the life of Christ expressly contradicts them. *Eternity*, or necessary existence: he "came forth from the Father." *Omnipresence:* he "goes his way to him that sent him." *Omnipotence:* he says, "Power is given me"; "Of myself I can do nothing"; "My Father is greater than I." *Omniscience:* "Of that day knoweth not the Son, but the Father only." *Absolute perfection:* "But one is good, that is God." *Self-sufficiency:* he prays, acknowledges his dependence, and says, "I thank thee that thou hast heard me." These examples are enough. I quote them, not for proof, but merely as specimens of the Gospel style. They show, as plainly as can be shown, that the general sense of Scripture is utterly hostile to the Orthodox theory; and that, without attributing strange dissimulation and ambiguity to the "Son of Man," as he almost always called himself, it is impossible to think of him as being at the same time the Infinite God, absolute in knowledge and supreme in power.

The verbal jugglery by which we are told of two natures in him, a Divine and a human,— if it means anything more than that the Divine spirit interpene-

trates and is the sustaining life of every human soul,— has no countenance and can find no excuse in the Testament. Make Jesus in a peculiar sense the representative to us of that divine or spiritual element common to us all in less degree, and you make his claims intelligible, the language of Scripture plain. Go beyond, though but a step, and you bring darkness and confusion, destroy the simplicity of the word, and perplex yourself with a vain and complicated theory, for which there is no justification in reason, Scripture, or the religious sense.*

II. Thus defective and doubtful as the evidence is, at best, which by means of Scriptural assertion or interpretation makes Jesus identical with God, the doctrine has yet been supposed to be borne out by other proofs, and justified on other grounds, independent of these. Of course, no other mode of direct proof is legitimate except the Scripture testimony. But it has been assumed to meet a great want of our minds, which otherwise could have no sure knowledge of God, and of our hearts, which could have no sure avenue of approach to him but through this medium. I have, then, to show that this assertion is incorrect; that mind and heart do not require such a doctrine of the Saviour; or, in the words of the proposition before stated, that it "fails

* I omit the argument respecting the pre-existence of Christ: — 1. Because it has nothing to do with the question of his Divinity, and Unitarians are of various minds about it. — 2. The three or four passages which seem to imply it are no more explicit than those which speak of men as "known," "glorified," "favoured," &c., before their birth (Jer. i. 5; Rom. viii. 30; 2 Tim. i. 8, 9). — 3. Because the general speculative notion of the pre-existence of souls would naturally, if shared by John, be applied peculiarly to his supposed sinless and glorified pre-existent state. What the doctrine really means, it would be beside my purpose to discuss.

of the great aim of religious enlightenment, while it is unessential to the Christian faith or hope."

The doctrine of the Deity of Christ, while it certainly bewilders and perplexes the mind, affords us no more certain knowledge of God. It is an error to suppose that by bestowing the name of what is unknown on a familiar object we become better acquainted with its real character. To call diamond charcoal may be said to have some degree of scientific truth; but, familiar as the one may be, it will not help explain the properties of the other, unless we know that too. No one, surely, will deny that Jesus lived and was known among his contemporaries as a man. As such he was loved, welcomed, followed, entreated; as such he was arrested, tried, accused, and put to death; and even his nearest friends were so far from suspecting a superior nature in him, that on his death they fell into complete despair, as if his project of restoring "the kingdom of Israel" had wholly failed. Evidently, then, during his ministry he had displayed only the qualities, attributes, characteristics, of a man. It was only human traits, such as benevolence, justice, moral courage, devoutness, that he exhibited, however set off and exalted by superiority of character or marvellousness of works. Where, then, do we find any relief to our perplexity, or light to our doubts of God, by being told that his nature was mysteriously present in that soul? If this signifies that the benevolence, justice, moral purity, spirituality, of the Divine character are akin to such qualities in the human soul, and that in this way Jesus was to his disciples' thought "the bright-

ness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person," what is it but to make more vivid our sense of the Divine attributes by a process of mind perfectly understood before, only better illustrated and further carried out? Or what is it, again, but to acknowledge ourselves unable, as indeed we are, to conceive of God otherwise, excepting from what is most pure and perfect in man? Of course, it must always be so. We cannot go beyond the region of our experience. We must take what we know as the hint, and project from that our idea of what we do not know. And, just so far as Jesus displays to us new traits of excellence, or makes us conscious of new germs of spiritual life in ourselves, just so far he brings us to a better knowledge of God. This is a truth of reason and experience, not a dogma of metaphysical theology.

But if we go any farther, we confuse ourselves by words without a meaning. The germ, the hint, the suggestion of a better *moral* knowledge of God, we find in the life of Jesus. But as a matter of definition, of accurate *scientific* knowledge, we are as much to seek as ever. Every definition we can frame, every phrase we use, every conception we entertain of God as distinct from man, gives us equally God as distinct from the Jesus of the Gospels. I say this not hastily or irreverently, or in any want of honour towards "the author and finisher of our faith." Every person claiming to be a Christian gives Jesus precisely the honour he understands him to claim. I am simply stating a contradiction which occurs necessarily in every (however Ortho-

dox) representation of Christ. Every form of words is used by which implicitly or explicitly he can be distinguished from the Infinite God. Except for a few express assertions now and then to the contrary, not a sermon or hymn or prayer but implies the difference and inferiority of Christ in respect to God. Nine-tenths of every Christian service are strictly Unitarian; only in the other tenth is the Trinitarian reservation made. And if this difficulty is evaded by saying that he was the human image of God, a finite representation of the infinite, the evasion is simply a contradiction in terms; for infinity is the very distinctive essence and characteristic of the Divine in itself, the only way you can represent it as differing from the human. The hypothesis of a double nature is an awkward and groundless fabrication, except as signifying the blending of the Divine and human elements in every soul. For we are all children of God, as well as children of the earth, and share the very immortality and spiritual essence of our Heavenly Father, as well as the corruption of mortal flesh.

And the other hypothesis, that the Divine Spirit took the place in him of a human soul, is no more satisfactory. If it means that his will, affection, thought, were absolutely and personally identical with those of God,—that he had no individuality as a man, and no human affection other than the love the Infinite feels for all his offspring,—that the volition which prompted a word of sympathy or rebuke, at the very same moment and in the sphere of the same consciousness, was controlling the movements

of the stars and the great course of Providence,— then, for so stupendous an assumption, a very different warrant from any we can find is needed, and a degree of evidence from the nature of the case unattainable. Any thing less than this is either the most unintelligible mysticism,— that doctrine which merges all human thought and will in the universal Deity, and so again confounds God, Christ, and man too in one vague identity,— or else is simply the doctrine which I have partly illustrated before, of the Divine presence in the human soul. Even if I went so far as to allow that the New Testament writers, or the early Christians, illustrated their idea of Christ as the image of God by the familiar Oriental idea of an incarnation of the Deity (such as we find in all accounts of the Hindoo mythology), still I should hold that their real sense and meaning is simply as I have already explained, when speaking of the baptism or anointing of the Spirit, and the spiritual presence of God in every faithful soul.

And, finally, I maintain that such a view is all that is essential to our religious faith or hope. After all, the doctrine of Christ's Divinity has its strongest hold in the devout heart, and as being supposed to meet a peculiar religious want. And, in a certain modified sense, this is so far from being denied, that it is expressly asserted and vindicated in the whole course of my argument. The real want is, to be assured of God's presence and aid to ourselves. In the dark era of superstition and distress, near a thousand years after the birth of Christ, when the earth seemed desolate and forsaken, as if God had aban-

doned it utterly to confusion and crime,—then it was a relief, a point of joyful, enthusiastic faith, to be assured of the "real presence" in the sacramental host. God, it was reverently believed, was bodily seen, felt, handled, tasted, in the bread and cup of communion. This was the sign men craved and welcomed then, of his abiding presence,—their proof that he had not deserted his children. And then it was that Christ was most closely identified with God, in terms that would seem shocking and blasphemous to us now, though then the utterance of sincere religious affection and faith. The great truth that God never deserts us, that he is still with us, though we see and know him not, could be expressed then in such symbols only as appealed to men's grosser senses, and in terms of which the paradox best stated the amazing and incredible truth.

From a similar feeling, men have clung to a belief in the Deity of Christ, lest otherwise they should seem to lose their hold on God, who was thus brought comparatively near, and into the compass of their affectionate thought. But the simpler statement of his Divine nature, in that sense in which we can be partly conscious of the same in us in our better moods of mind, not only is quite as near the Testament phraseology, but it does not perplex or confront our reason; it does not bewilder our mind; it does not repel by a dogma, when it should cheer and comfort by an element of faith and love.

Do you say it is a degradation to the pure and exalted soul of Jesus to bring him thus within the range of our personal sympathy, into the circle

of our human brotherhood? Ask yourself, first, whether your own view of humanity, of man the child of God, made in the image of God, has not been degraded and profaned; whether the knowledge of man's guilt has not clouded your mind with despair for man; whether it is not your distrust in the promise of God for all, your unbelief in the Divine influence and presence with all, that makes you unwilling to acknowledge Christ as perfectly and simply a brother-man. Renew your hope; revive your faith in God's universal providence; and you will no longer think it strange and a profanation to represent Christ as the Son of Man. The profanation will rather be in the unwillingness to speak of man as the Son of God. The Divine presence in nature and the soul,—the countenance of love and pity with which God looks on us,—the merciful dealing of Providence towards us,—the devout rapture that assures us we are not forgotten or despised of Him without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground,—these will be the object of your thought. The religious want will be amply met and satisfied, according as you cherish such a sentiment as this. And then it will seem the most natural and beautiful thing in the world, that he who for long ages has stood foremost in men's thought as the most perfect representative of the Divinity, who has not only been honoured as the Son of God, but worshipped in affectionate faith as the Infinite One himself,—that he should be regarded as differing from us not in kind, but in degree; as a brother-man, whose faith was so lofty and serene, whose thought

was so clear, whose mind was so free of evil stain, that he stood, as it were, within the very border of the spiritual world, and nothing was between his soul and God.

As the very Infinite, his words can have no sincere meaning: his suffering must be unreal; his temptation, a dramatic show; his prayers, an insincerity; his sorrowing affection, an assumed disguise; his example, of no application to our mortal state. Analyze your own thought of him, and you will find it resolves itself very much into what I have said. Whether Orthodox or Unitarian,— adhering to a form of words asserting his Divinity, or trusting to your general regard for him and sense of what the Scriptures teach,— in point of fact, the sentiment of all involves the same fundamental view. A hundred differences there may be in points of criticism, in particular opinions here and there; but the legitimate, true, and only sense in which it is possible to conceive of Jesus as the Son of God is as representative of the spiritual faculty in ourselves, and as exalting our own nature by a nearer moral likeness to our Father.

Forced and strained beyond this simple truth, the doctrine is one reposing on insufficient evidence, and in the highest degree confounding to our reason. He is taken from the sphere of our sympathy, and put in a position merely official towards us. An arbitrary and artificial array of "offices" is assigned him, in place of the free, natural, spontaneous exercise of spiritual power by a gloriously endowed and sincerely faithful soul. The charge of assuming such

a character he repels as explicitly as possible, in the words which best express his true spiritual relation to man and God:—"If he called them gods unto whom the word of God came, how say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God?" His own exposition of that lofty declaration, "I and my Father are one," is when he prays for all his disciples throughout the world, "*that they all may be one;* as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

NOTE.—In several of the above comments, particularly those on pp. 79–81, the argument is strictly limited to the field of our common understanding and experience. These topics were, however, treated by the early Christian theologians, and even in the New Testament, in a manner highly technical and quite foreign to us. For some of the points thus treated, see the article on "Early Christian Doctrine" in the *Unitarian Review* for December, 1888, and (especially) the chapter translated from Pfleiderer's "Urchristenthum" in the same Review for May and June, 1889. See also Chap. II. of "Orthodoxy and Heresy," by E. H. Hall (Boston: A. U. A.).

DISCOURSE V.

THE VICARIOUS ATONEMENT.

IF, WHEN WE WERE ENEMIES, WE WERE RECONCILED TO GOD BY THE DEATH OF HIS SON, MUCH MORE, BEING RECONCILED, WE SHALL BE SAVED BY HIS LIFE.— Romans v. 10.

In the two preceding Discourses I have endeavoured to show that the doctrines of the Trinity and Deity of Christ, whatever their possible truth in the abstract reality of things, cannot be so established and proved as to serve for a basis to our theory of the Divine government. The evidence is too imperfect, the interpretations too contradictory, to them both, to suffer them to be either a *sufficient* or an *intelligible* foundation of our faith. The doctrine of the Atonement, closely connected with and presupposing both, must be taken on its own merits; it cannot derive any collateral support from them. If this is true, they are also true; but this has got to be established first, on its own independent evidence.

And, as the Atonement is the cardinal point in the Orthodox theory, and the strong point in Orthodox interpretation, so I freely confess that it brings more difficulty, creates more diversity of exposition, and is less satisfactorily treated, among those who dissent from that theory, than any or all of the other

points. Not that there is any doubt in our minds as to the essential correctness of our opinion. On the contrary, we more expressly and definitely and consistently oppose the theory of the Divine government which it implies, than perhaps any other one of the Orthodox positions. Elsewhere we make concessions,— yield one point to religious feeling, another to obscurity of interpretation; while this is the very doctrine, the very system, which we contend against. But our concessions elsewhere, the style in which the controversy is carried on, are just what make it difficult to meet point-blank the arguments urged here. On the usual acknowledged principles of Biblical interpretation, there is certainly an apparent advantage on the other side.

Our difficulty is not as to the doctrine, but as to the style of argument and illustration used by the writers of the New Testament. Our general objections to the doctrine, as commonly laid down, are sufficiently decided. We are quite clear in our own minds when we say, in general, that Scripture language is to be interpreted, not like the strict and scientific language of a creed, but according to the demands of the religious sentiment and the way of thinking of the time. We cannot, indeed, always draw the line, and say how much latitude we may allow to the religious feeling, how much is to be ascribed to the customs of religious thought. And so we are sometimes hard pushed on particular expressions, and forced to remain in doubt of the precise intention of many an obscure passage. Still, of our general principle we have no doubt whatever; and

as to the points of critical perplexity, they yield one by one as we study the mind and history of the apostles, until, in these last few years, we have (we think) as consistent and full and learned an exegesis as any class of commentators, and the teachings of the Testament throughout are felt to be in almost, if not quite, unbroken harmony with our essential views of religious truth.

The exposition of the Scriptural view of the life and death of Christ has been so fully and admirably stated, by several well-known writers, that it need not be detailed here, and I pass it over with only the briefest mention.* The words of my text suggest clearly enough the principle we follow; and they are, I think, wholly irreconcilable with the Orthodox statement of Christ's atoning work. "If, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Here it is not the death of Christ that saves us, but his life,—evidently, by creating the faith and moral energy and religious affections essential to the spiritual health (or salvation) of our soul. It is not God that is reconciled to man by the death of his Son, but man that is reconciled to God; that is, the reconciling (or atoning) agency is wrought upon man, in the sphere of his affections, conscience, and reason. Whatever the influence is, then, it is a *moral* influence, acting according to the laws of the development of human character and the conditions of human life. It is a

* See Liverpool Lectures, Lect. VI. One part of this exposition I have briefly stated below (p. 105) by way of illustration.

moral, not a legal work, done in the sphere of man's life, and not in that of God's. He needs no reconciliation with man; it were strange impiety to think it. Nothing is needed except that state of man's heart which makes it possible for the Divine love to be felt there. The self-devotion of Jesus Christ to humiliation, pain, and death brings about just that state — no matter how — by laws God has written on the heart, and effects just that reconciling work; this then is to be followed up by the series of moral lessons and religious influences from his life, that the spiritual growth and blessedness of the soul may be complete.

This, as I understand it, is the religious lesson taught, not only in this passage, but throughout the Testament, in connection with the life and death of Christ. It is dwelt on continually, fondly; with the affectionate constancy we might expect in the personal friends of Jesus; with such emphasis and illustration as the circumstances of the time required. I presume that all Orthodox commentators cheerfully accept this view of the moral influence on man of the life and death of Christ, not thinking (which I do) that it is at variance with their theory. But they add to it, besides, that that event fulfilled a purpose in the Divine economy wholly above and aside from any moral influence on man; that it was the appointed sacrifice to expiate the guilt of the whole human race; that it was in the strictest sense *vicarious*, or accepted *instead* of the corresponding suffering to be endured by men, taking the place of their just punishment; that its efficacy was infinite, as

involving an infinite being in its doom; that by a previous appointment of God, wholly independent of any thing in the human will, its merit passes over, and becomes the purchase-money, the ransom, the seal, of man's redemption; and, in fine, that on this condition, and this alone, could the claims of God's justice and mercy be reconciled, or any single man escape the penalty due to the infinite guilt of the human race. It is in this region of speculation and dogma that we find ourselves confronting a hostile theory. This is the view of the Divine government to which we express and maintain an unqualified opposition.

Of the class of ideas involved in this hypothesis, their bearing on the Divine character and man's condition, I have spoken somewhat fully before. My object now is to examine the grounds on which this theory is sustained, and to show its variance with Scripture and right reason. My argument will, therefore, be contained in these two main points: first, the insufficiency of the evidence on which this doctrine is supposed to rest; second, the contradictory and impossible nature of the ideas contained in it. And, for the sake of a clearer understanding, I will first recount shortly the different forms in which the doctrine has been held.

The leading idea now, as is well known, is that of an infinite sacrifice, supposed to be required by the constitution of the Divine government, to vindicate its majesty, pay the penalty due to sin, and (in the strange language of its defenders) "enable God *honourably* to pardon human guilt." This is its

present, its *modern* form; not its first or ancient form. As I said when speaking of the Trinity, the idea of an infinite sacrifice did not enter definitely into the statements of the earlier creeds. The motive then was simply to give the greatest possible honour to Christ, as well as to satisfy the Greek or Eastern spirit of speculation. Finding, however, the death of Jesus spoken of as a ransom, the dogmatists naturally asked, *For what* and *to whom* was the ransom paid? To deliver man from hell, was the reply; and it must have been paid to Satan, for his power it was that bound men's souls in hell. And so the received opinion was, that Christ's death was the ransom or equivalent paid in due form of covenant to Satan, as the literal purchase-money of man's redemption. And this interpretation was further carried out, by saying that Christ outwitted Satan, as Satan had deceived Adam in paradise. He cheated Adam, by promising gifts which proved treacherous,—as, in legends and fables, the coin the Devil pays is said always to turn into dry leaves and dust. And just so, in retaliation, Christ persuaded Satan to take him as substitute for the whole human race; then, he consenting, and so losing his hold on man, Christ, in virtue of his omnipotence, escaped and foiled the Adversary at his own weapons. "Under the bait of the flesh," to use a favorite expression, "the hook of the Divinity was hid." Strange as this sounds to us, it is yet perfectly in keeping with the spirit of those times,—especially of the old Pagan superstitions, from which many ideas crept into the Church in the times of

barbarism. This was the first distinct and consistent form in which the doctrine of Christ's sacrifice was held,— not regarded then as strictly infinite, but only as of such a sort as to serve for a sufficient decoy and bait to Satan.

A thousand years after the apostolic times, another theory was developed,— still more prominent in the Roman Church, and making one part of the modern Orthodox scheme. It was, that the merits of Christ, and his death, were the literal payment of our debt to God, and so entitle man to his forgiveness. For man owes all to God. The perfect obedience of every thought, act, wish, would not be more than enough. No man does or can pay off his own account; but, as the merits of Christ are infinite, and "imputed" to man, there is laid up as it were an infinite treasury of good works, out of which benefit will be had by certain conditions. And the Catholic theory is, that the Church is the depositary of this resource; its ministers keep the treasury-keys; and it can make dispensation, in its own way, to remove the penalty of man's guilt. And hence the whole theory of indulgences.

And lastly, out of this, by an easy transition, was developed the modern doctrine, which I have more fully set forth. In this the prominent idea is the vindication of the honour or integrity of the Divine government, together with the metaphysical impossibility of removing the penalty of sin except its infinite guilt be atoned for by an infinite corresponding sacrifice; which, again, could only be offered by God himself.

It will be observed that the *metaphysical* part of the theory, or that which is out of the range of man's character and ability, has been gradually retreating,—becoming more refined and abstract,—while the *moral* part has come more and more clearly into view. The rude and coarse idea at first was, an actual compact between God and the Devil, for the purchase of man, as a piece of goods, or his ransom, as a literal prisoner or slave; while now it is an extremely remote and abstract point of metaphysical reasoning, to define moral evil in such a way as to make it require, or even allow, the actual sacrifice of atonement. Then, man was held to be in passive bondage, and passively transferred; now, a thousand moral influences are acting on him, to determine his spiritual state,—at most presupposing a certain previous condition, or method of administering the government of God. Even those who hold the Orthodox view abstractly, still prefer to dwell upon the human side; and it is not hard to see that this element will soon outgrow and swallow up the other wholly. And my purpose now is to show that this result is both necessary and right; in other words, that the metaphysical element included in the so-called doctrine of the Atonement is a gratuitous and needless inference from Scripture, and repugnant both to reason and our highest view of right.

I. The Scripture proof, adduced in support of the Orthodox view of Atonement, is imperfect, and not to be relied on. The word itself is found only once in the New Testament, and then in a passage

(the verse following my text) where, by universal allowance, it should be "reconciliation." It is a word which, in its proper meaning, belongs only to the Old Testament, where it signifies something very like the Roman Catholic idea of penance, only paid in the form of sacrifice,—that is, the design is not to make up for a *moral offence* committed, which would have been an encouragement to immorality, but to expiate some *legal offence*, or disability, or "impurity," from which one was ransomed, and restored to his full religious privileges as a Jew, by a certain prescribed form of sacrifice,—the arrears, or residue, unatoned for, being made up in the manner which I shall presently mention. This is the idea of "atonement," as found among the Jews. It had nothing to do with moral guilt: only pagan priesthoods professed to expiate that by gifts. But it referred to the ritual law, and the Jewish national observances of sacrifice. And so, in the legitimate and proper meaning of the word, it evidently has nothing to do with the death of Christ.

At the same time, it is easy to see how the religious customs of the Jews, established for centuries, would be constantly used among them in illustration of religious ideas; and especially how Jewish Christians would seek to blend the new faith with the old, by tracing every possible analogy that could be found or fancied in the Old Testament. To explain this fully requires far more time and attention than can be given to it here; but a single illustration will show partly what I mean.

The Epistle to the Hebrews endeavours, from first

to last, to meet the Hebrew prejudices and reconcile the Jews to the simplicity of the Christian faith. This could be done only through the medium of their previous ideas. Christianity without priest or ritual was a thing they could not comprehend; and even those inclined towards the new religion contemplated this feature of it with vague terror and dislike. Now the writer must show, if possible, *on Jewish principles*, how the ritual not only might be, but actually had been, done away. One main point of his argument may be stated thus.* On the great annual festival of Atonement, or expiation, the high-priest went within the veil of the temple, and sprinkled the blood of the victim on the mercy-seat, expiating thus the thousand legal offences for which due propitiation had not been already made. At that moment the burden of *legal debt* was lifted off from the entire people; and, *while he remained within the veil*, the usual sacrifices were superseded. Now Christ, the great high-priest of the new dispensation, had passed with his own blood, as victim, behind the veil of mortality, to the mercy-seat, or immediate presence of God. By the strictest interpretation of the Jewish law, all sacrifices are therefore suspended; and, on their own principles, while he is within the veil, the ceremonial worship is no longer required. Christ's peculiar fitness, both as priest (for he is near to us in human sympathy, and can "be touched with the feeling of our infirmities") and as victim (for in the innocence of his life he is "a lamb without spot or blemish"), is elaborately argued and illustrated;

* See Liverpool Lectures, Lect. VI. (by James Martineau).

and the reasoning is brought to a focus, as it were, by comparing the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus with the ninth of this Epistle.

But there were still other points that gave uneasiness to the mind of Jews taught to believe implicitly in the ancient faith. Among the rest, the sacred line of the priesthood, unbroken from the time of Aaron, must not be broken in upon, they thought; and even granting Christ to be such a priest as was needed in the new dispensation, how will he satisfy this claim? To answer this, the writer reminds them of a royal priest, who lived in old traditionary times, long before Aaron, to whom Abraham himself, the father of the faithful, did honour; far higher, then, in dignity than any son of Abraham could be. And here, says he, is just such a priest as Christ. This old Melchisedek — without any recorded father or mother, of whom you know not so much as when he began to live or when he died — is the great royal priest of our ancient history. God's own anointing, not any hereditary descent, gave him his priestly dignity; and just so it is with Christ.

Now this turn of argument shows how impossible it is for us to reason with any confidence from the style of illustrations used in arguments to the Jews and Gentiles of that period. As to this very instance, all sorts of strange hypotheses have been invented to account for the mention of old Melchisedek, and to set aside the plain and simple meaning. Some have gone so far as to conjecture vaguely that he might be God himself, revealing himself to Abraham; others, that he might be Christ in a pre-exist-

ent state, or a man miraculously made, like Adam, without any human parents. He has also been supposed to be the Holy Spirit, an angel, or Enoch, who lived before the flood. A favourite Jewish notion has been that he was Shem, the son of Noah. And a sect arose in the early centuries affirming him to be the superior of Christ, and adopting his name, instead of Christ's, for their designation. The plain meaning seems to be, that he occurred to the Apostle's (or writer's) mind as an excellent instance to show the very point he was urging,— a case in hand to prove the simple and to us very obvious proposition, that one can be just as good a priest, even if his father was not a priest before him, and we know nothing whatever of his history.

It seems, then, to be entirely impossible to force an argument from the style of illustrations used in the Testament, so as to give a particular dogmatic meaning to the life and death of Christ. It is undeniable that only by such a style of argument can the doctrine of the Atonement be sustained a single hour. Deprive it of the support found in a few appeals, illustrations, religious phrases of speech of this class, and it falls directly to the ground. To uphold it, you must take a certain class of arguments, similar to that I have just cited in reference to Melchisedek; you must insist upon their literal and extreme construction, divorce them from their connection with the prevalent religious ideas and the subject-matter of the Christian faith as a whole, read them as closely and severely as a formula in algebraic signs and symbols, and in that way evolve

your metaphysical theory, which thenceforward you make the keystone of your structure and the cardinal point of your whole religious scheme. It would be tedious and unprofitable to go critically over the whole ground, and expound one by one the phrases and figures of speech supposed to favour that theory. From the general statement I have made, which (whatever the abstract truth or falseness of the doctrine) is plainly and undeniably correct, you will see how false must be the principle, and how unsatisfactory the evidence, by which a doctrine so derived can be sustained. I do not deny or disguise the difficulty of special passages; but I do say that to found one's theory on those difficulties, and make dark things serve as the basis and interpretation of what is plain, is utterly to reverse the process of a healthy mind, and to set us all afloat as to any principles of belief whatever.

Now contrast with this obscure and uncertain style of Scriptural reasoning the simple, affectionate, spiritual style which we find at the fountain-head. To Christ himself we should surely go to learn the intention of his mission, especially from his hints to interpret if we may the mystery of his death. And, as if expressly not to leave us in the dark on so interesting a matter, or to correct beforehand the abuses and crude superstitions that were sure to come up, there is left recorded a conversation of Jesus with his disciples on this very point,— the saving influence of his life and death,— held just before he suffered, and longer than all his other recorded discourses put together, excepting one. And what does

he say of an atoning sacrifice, the discharge of an infinite penalty, the ransom of the guilty by the sufferings of the innocent? Not a word, not a syllable. So far as I am aware, not a single sentence from this discourse of Christ, or any other, has ever been brought up in support of the Orthodox theory; at least, except in illustration of those points of *motive* and *affection* which belong in common to every Christian. The Gospel ground has been quietly abandoned, for purposes of theological argument, to those of differing belief. To sustain that theory, recourse must always be had to the involved and perplexing train of argument or style of illustration used in combating the scruples, and braiding in the Christian idea with the previous religious thoughts and habits and prejudices, of Jews or pagans,—and these often violent, bigoted, wayward, cavilling adversaries of the simple truth. No wonder this way of reasoning was adopted, for there was none other. Nothing but the most perverse ingenuity, the most singular love of paradox and hidden meaning, could possibly imagine any thing in the Gospel story but the personal appeal, the living faith, the spiritual presence, the sanctifying influence, of the living or departed Saviour, as felt and recognized in the affectionate mind of those who saw him and listened to his words. His death, as he speaks of it, has no supernatural and metaphysical efficacy on the purposes and ways of God. It is simply a return to the Father; the seal of his living testimony; the condition of his spiritual presence, and of the coming of the pure Spirit of Truth, to dwell in their hearts.

II. Having remarked thus much of the quality and style of the Scriptural argument, I proceed briefly to consider the merits of the theory itself; taking its own claims and pretensions, accepting its most plausible and consistent shape, and endeavouring to see how it comes recommended to our intellectual and moral sense.

The first thing we observe in it is, that a huge deficiency is left in the theory of redemption, which there is not even the smallest pretence to supply. The very terms in which it must be stated carry their own refutation along with them. Of the strange and pagan idea of a "conflict of attributes" in the Divine nature, I have spoken before. I need not repeat now what I said then, or stop to prove (what is very plain) that this conflict is essential to the scheme. But here we are met by the inquiry: If there was a chasm or conflict between the qualities of mercy and justice in the mind of God, and if Christ (which is also essential to this theory) was really and truly God, coequal with the Father, must there not have been the same conflict of attributes in him too? Is the Father deficient in mercy, that he requires so terrible a sacrifice? Or has the Son only an obscure and feeble sense of justice, that he can "honourably" not only overlook man's guilt, but so love the world as to give himself to die for it? If the honour of God did not allow him to pardon the guilty, could that same honour allow him to punish the innocent? Or else, would not the "justice" of the Son require satisfaction too, and so a series of infinite sacrifices be demanded, *ad infinitum?* Or

if one is enough, why is any needed at all? If the rest of the series be remitted, why not this? The answer will be, that God required the sacrifice, and God endured it, and so the circle is complete. So it is; and it is simply a circle of operations in the mind of God. And I say the statement of the doctrine carries its own refutation; because, when fairly presented and reasoned out, it reduces itself to this: *Whatever the demands of Divine justice, suppose them even infinite, they are perfectly and adequately met by the infinite love of God.* We have not so much to dread from his sovereignty, as to trust in his power. And the fiction of a suffering God, enduring a penalty exacted by himself, is only a device to render that glorious conception familiar to our imperfect mind.

But the dogmatist will insist that the sacrifice was actually and historically accomplished in the death of Christ. To this we can only reply by the unanswerable dilemma which has been employed from the first, and from which no refuge can be found, except in an unmeaning form of words. Either the infinite nature of God suffered upon the cross, or the finite nature of man. If you say the former, you commit the strange and unintelligible blasphemy of saying that the infinite and perfect is subject to limitation, distress, and harm,— to all the worst and most humiliating conditions of man's imperfection. If you say the latter, then the doctrine of an infinite sacrifice falls to the ground at once. Or if you insist, yet further, that both natures were mysteriously blended in Jesus, you do not yet evade the difficulty. One or

the other nature *in him* must suffer: which was it? And if you take the last resource, of saying that the union of attributes in him was of such a sort that the sufferings of the man were "judicially attributed" to the God, and it was regarded in the Divine economy *as if* the infinite nature had suffered to redeem an infinite amount of guilt, then you fall back just where I wish,—on the free and abundant mercy of God. And your real meaning is, not that God *does* demand, but that, in consideration of his own infinite perfection and the feebleness and misery of man, he *does not* demand an infinite penalty to expiate our human guilt; and, though conscience may tell us we deserve it, has yet symbolically shown, in the death of Jesus, that the resources of Divine love are boundless, so that no human being need despair. Here, evidently enough, whether you retain the symbol or not, you desert the dogmatic meaning, and fall back on the pure, simple, *religious* truth, appealing only to the mind, conscience, and heart of men.

A further illustration may be addressed to those familiar with the theory of mathematics. Allowing the full and literal exactness of the statement, that the suffering endured by an infinite being constitutes an infinite sacrifice, we have not got to the bottom of the difficulty. We may thus admit that the agony of Christ was equal in *intensity* to the infinite agony of hell, but it was only momentary in *duration.* In hell, infinite intensity and duration are supposed to be combined, while the penalty is liable to be inflicted on an infinite number. Thus "an

infinite quantity of the first degree" (in the language of mathematics) is compared with "an infinite quantity of the second degree," and the ratio between them, as all mathematicians know, is nothing; or with one of the third degree, where it is infinitely less than nothing. Or, taking in the difference between a divine and a human soul, to set off against the endless doom denounced to human guilt, the comparison will be only one degree improved; so that Christ himself could not make good the penalty for all, and would be precisely as far from it as a mere man from making atonement for a single person. Remember, it is the Orthodox creed which forces on us this discussion of infinites, and makes its strong point from it. It is no choice of ours; but if we must take it, we will go with it as far as any one. Take the doctrine at its word, concede its leading principle, and we see how it instantly confutes and swallows up itself. The difference, on its own terms, is enormous, infinite; and all it can reply is, that *the free mercy of God allows this difference.*

But still further: granting all that the doctrine would imply, its practical signification is lost and cast aside in the concessions of its advocates, or rather in their strenuous and urgent demand for something more. I find in the course of reasoning employed in illustrating a comparatively moderate view of the Calvinistic scheme, the following extraordinary paragraph: —

> Notwithstanding the unlimited provision of the Gospel, *all*, when left to themselves, with one consent reject the overtures of mercy, and will not come unto Christ that

they might have life. Even when the Spirit strives, they do always resist. No sense of guilt and danger, no consciousness of obligation and duty, no pressure of motives, will constrain a living man to lay down the arms of rebellion, and be reconciled to God. If the Spirit of God does not put forth the power and glory of his grace, to wrest the weapons of revolt from his hands, and put a new spirit within him, and make the sinner willing in the day of his power, *all are lost, and Christ is dead in vain.*

In perfect accordance with this, I have heard it represented that, even after his death and resurrection, Christ may be supposed as still doubtful whether his sacrifice would be accepted, until he rose to heaven and took his place beside the eternal throne. That is, in plain words, the whole vast apparatus being brought in play, the infinite agony having been endured, it is *doubtful* whether God will even yet relent, and *perfectly certain* that man will spurn the boon of mercy. If any thing could be added to the hideous atrocity of such a statement, it would be the dogmatic inference which follows: — "When Christ, in the covenant of peace, engaged to lay down his life for the world, *a stipulated number* were given him as his reward." These are the "*elect.*" God can now choose whom he will to eternal life, and is perfectly clear of partiality or blame in condemning all the rest to eternal death! In other words, by making an offer which he knew beforehand would be rejected, he finds the excuse he wanted for condemning the vast majority of mankind to the inexorable torments of hell for ever!

Thus is this doctrine strictly and logically reasoned

out to its last results. There is no over-statement or caricature in what has now been said. The worst things I have shown you are quoted word for word from a moderate and popular exposition of a milder form of the Calvinistic creed. By going back a hundred years, or taking another class of writers, I could display far more extravagant and terrible representations than these. But what I have represented is precisely the last result of the Orthodox theory, as consistently held at the present day; and I do not know very well how to describe it in milder language than I have now used. And I think I have said enough to show that, in whatever way you look at that theory, it reduces itself to an incredible paradox. It annihilates its own first principles; it is involved in a dilemma from which there is no escape; by acknowledgment, it does not answer its end; and it results at last in what, to one not familiar with such ideas, seems a frightful and appalling blasphemy.

And, in fine, our objections to this doctrine may be summed up in this one word. We do not, we cannot, believe in any such God, or such theory of sin and its consequences, as is taken for granted here. The moral difficulty in it is worse than even the intellectual, and is absolutely insurmountable. Besides the radical contradiction of God being unable "honourably" to forgive the world, and then able not only to forgive, but to suffer and die for it; besides the strange and barbarous assumption, that the torture of an infinite and holy being could restore God's damaged honour and make amends for human guilt; besides the dilemma of supposing that

the Infinite nature can suffer harm, or else of finding no expiation after all; besides the matching of one infinity against a combination of three,— time and number being superadded to intensity, to make the sufferings of man by a double infinity more than those of Christ; besides the acknowledged failure of the whole scheme, unless a new order of Divine operations be brought in *to compel its partial success*, —all which objections we have found lying against the scheme of vicarious sacrifice,— the moral theory of man's nature which it involves is worse than all. As if moral guilt could be even "judicially" transferred, and assumed by some one else, like a pecuniary debt! As if the great retribution which every soul must undergo for its own wrong, in virtue of its own moral nature, could be averted by another's suffering! As if a conscience awake to the reality of sin and the glorious prospect of holiness and spiritual life could consent to receive, or entertain the possibility of receiving, absolution on such terms, transferring its own penalty, and appropriating another's righteousness! If the moral influence of Christ's death creates such a spirit in man as to wipe away his guilt, then nothing more is required. Guilt itself, speaking morally, is the penalty, the bondage, the revenge of guilt; and the faith and love that have superseded it are *the very blessing* that was to be sought. If the guilt is not removed, the salvation is not possible. Spiritual blessedness cannot be put upon a man from without, like clothes or riches. It is inconsistent with the condition of a guilty soul. And, if the guilt is removed, what do we want besides?

So here, again, we find ourselves reduced to an alternative, either branch of which destroys the force of the Orthodox dogma. Either the moral influence of Christ's life and death, in combination with other providential influence, prevails on the human heart to renounce its sin, or it does not. If it does, it would be daring impiety to say that God requires any thing more before he will abate the penalty of sin, and so the Atonement is no longer needed; or, if it does not, then man is not in a condition to receive salvation at all, and the Atonement is no longer possible. If you escape from this by saying that God in addition will work upon the hearts of the elect, and compel them to receive the favour they had refused, then you commit two more blunders: first, by defying all the laws of man's moral constitution, which cannot receive any form of blessedness without being morally fit for it; and, second, by ascribing to the free and even compulsory mercy of God *after* the sacrifice of Christ what you maintained it to be dangerous and impossible for him to grant before.

I do not suppose that these inconsistencies and solecisms are present consciously in the mind of those who advocate this scheme. Or, if they ever become faintly aware of them, they are overborne by the single point of practical religious faith contained in it. This I have endeavoured to bring out in clear relief, as the conclusion of each section of my argument, lest you might think I overlook or deny the religious significance of the dogma. This I by no means do. I have represented it uniformly

as a symbolical or mythological or dogmatic way of representing the perfect love and infinite mercy associated in the Christian scheme with the awful sovereignty of God. The statement, that the sacrifice was literally required and actually made, I treat as a symbol or "myth"; and the real meaning of it I consider to be the comforting truth which I have already expressed. And this is in point of fact the very meaning which is always seized and held in the religious heart. No man, when he is told to repose his hope of God's mercy on the sufferings of Christ, thinks of God's previous inexorable wrath, which made such sufferings essential before he would forgive; neither does he think of the lost condition of the mass of men, to whom the Atonement does not apply; still less of the immense probability (according to this scheme) that he himself is of those abandoned by God and lost. It is a curious fact, and one which does infinite honour to man's natural confidence in God, that every person tacitly assumes (whatever his religious theory) that *he himself is one of the elect*,—at least so far as this, that, if he does his part, he has nothing to fear on God's part. This, I say, is a part of every man's natural faith; and is never shaken, except at some crisis of momentary excitement, or some condition of religious frenzy. It is the normal and healthy attitude of the soul; and it is always taken advantage of in urging the motive of hope in the Calvinistic scheme, even though its more dreadful and implacable features are held in reserve. Ask any believer in it what it is that recommends it, and

he will tell you, the point of hope it gives him,— the countenance of Divine compassion it shows to him. Ask him, further, how it bears on the world in general, and he will acknowledge perhaps enough to make him cherish his private hope more preciously in contrast, or dread to quit his hold on it. But he will not bring that part of it into a definite proposition; and it is only with reluctance that he admits it at all. Or, with still more creditable inconsistency, he tacitly assumes that such is the inevitable condition of things naturally; and considers that the creed, which in fact is the only ground for believing it, is instead the only way of escaping it.

And, finally, this point of personal religious faith is the only thing which could have made it possible for the doctrine to be so long received and cherished. In whatever way we take it, when looked at narrowly, it conducts us to the same result, as we have seen. And that result is perfect faith in the love of God, as prevailing over every degree of sin. Whatever is added to this on God's part is a barbarous and obscure statement of metaphysics, confounding and bewildering our whole idea of the Divine government. Whatever can be added to it on man's part is that order of motives, of moral appeal, which should direct the spiritual discipline and heavenward aspiration of the soul. And, as none of God's works is made in vain, and no development of man's religious thought without its use, I suppose that, even in the crude and imperfect forms under which the Christian doctrine of recon-

ciliation has been held, it has served a valuable purpose in educating the conscience and the mind of men. I do not think the appeals and arguments by which the theories have been sustained were without their use. That would be to discredit too much the providential training man's religious thought has undergone.

But I think these appeals and arguments have served their turn, and had better be dispensed with. The moral and intellectual difficulties with which they are found to be inextricably involved are forced more and more strongly upon our notice. But one invaluable thing we owe in great measure even to this harsh and imperfect statement of the truth. *Conviction of sin* and *confidence of access to God* are certainly the characteristics, the two co-ordinate features, by which the religious life of Christendom has been distinguished from all other forms of human development. In whatever degree these have been due to the earnest enforcement of those creeds which have sought to account for the expiation of man's guilt through the sufferings of Christ, we owe them many thanks. But while we retain the spiritual truth, we need not adhere to the baseless, illogical, unscriptural error which may happen to be connected with it. The ultimate ground of trust, at any rate, is the free mercy of God, as illustrated in the life and word and death of Christ. To make our theory perfect, we have only to transfer this glorious faith, beyond its present limits, to the whole circle of the Divine government, and adore the God of love in "all his works, in all places of his dominion."

DISCOURSE VI.

DEPRAVITY OF HUMAN NATURE.

I KNOW THAT IN ME (THAT IS, IN MY FLESH) DWELLETH NO GOOD THING: FOR TO WILL IS PRESENT WITH ME, BUT HOW TO PERFORM THAT WHICH IS GOOD I FIND NOT. FOR THE GOOD THAT I WOULD I DO NOT; BUT THE EVIL WHICH I WOULD NOT, THAT I DO.— Romans vii. 18, 19.

In the three preceding Discourses, I have considered the three cardinal doctrines of Orthodoxy, as applying to the nature and purposes of God,— those which belong strictly (by the old scholastic division) to the department of Theology, or the religious system on its Divine side. These are the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, and the Vicarious Atonement. In the three to follow, I am to consider it on its Human side, or the direct bearing of the Divine economy on the condition, the destiny, and the culture of mankind. The topics which will come accordingly in review will be Human Nature, Retribution, and the Scriptures. These will complete the circle of the dogmatic or controversial points which we are passing in review.

As we easily see, our view of human nature must serve as the basis and point of departure for all our religious theory. If we think of Christianity in its bearing on the human race in general, its method of

operation, its progress, history, and present state, of course the view we presuppose of man's moral condition makes the element by which we determine all the rest. Or if we think of it as a personal matter, as applying to our own condition, and appealing to our own conscience, then our view of human nature as a whole is reflected as it were in ourselves; our conscious or unconscious philosophy, our dogmatic belief one or the other way, is what determines the meaning and force and direction of all our views of duty, and of any moral appeal.

The alternative between the two systems is simply stated. If man is in a lost, rebellious, and ruined state,— if you and I by nature share in the disaster and doom of the Fall, from which no natural strength or wisdom could, in the ordinary course of Providence, deliver us,— then salvation is a RESCUE, a ransom on given conditions, the bringing of all or a chosen number out of infinite misery and darkness into a degree of peace and a hope of glory which, in their natural estate, there was not the smallest reason to anticipate; and no terms could be judged strange or unreasonable by which such redemption might be brought about. If, on the other hand, man's condition is one of sin, indeed, and misery, of weakness and imperfection, yet not of curse or natural enmity towards God, then the true meaning of salvation is not so much *rescue from a specific calamity* as *spiritual health and growth;* religion is a method of culture, by means of whatever nourishes the soul in goodness; and all the discipline and experience of life, when rightly used, is part of the Divinely appointed training of the immortal spirit.

These two ways of regarding the condition of man, and the consequent work and meaning of religion, are radically different and hostile, and are the most characteristic and central point of difference between the opposing systems. And though the difference be one of philosophy full as much as of theology, though it apply full as much to our entire view of life as to our interpretation of the Christian records, yet it serves to mark and separate the two schools of religious thinking no less than our various understanding of the Trinity, or the sacrifice of Christ. The doctrine of man's native and total depravity, in the sense in which I take it, was set forth somewhat fully in the first of these Discourses, where I assumed it as the point of departure for the religious system of Orthodoxy. I need not repeat what was said then, but proceed rather to those questions of character, evidence, and result, which belong more properly to the argument I have now in hand.

I have just said that our view of human nature in general is very much a transcript, or amplification, or (in some cases) an exaggerated contrast, of the view conscience and reason give us as to our own moral state. Hence it is exposed to all the extravagance, to all the bigotry and narrowness and morbid eccentricities which, according to health, temperament, good or ill success in life, and various other causes, may affect our moral judgment of ourselves. Our judgment of mankind is a species of egotism. Every man looks on the world in a light coloured by the medium it must pass through before it strikes his eye. What we see is always affected

more or less by what we are. The judgment of the character and condition of the world, among religious men, makes no exception to this rule. According to the type and character of their faith will they take a sanguine or a gloomy view of things. A happy trust in God, or amiable feeling towards men, will incline them to see things hopefully, and make every possible allowance for existing evil. Sensitiveness of conscience and honest self-reproach will make them use strong words in speaking of impiety, inhumanity, and wrong generally. The Bible abounds in examples of both these states of feeling. The cheerful piety of some of the Hebrew Psalms, speaking of man as "a little lower than the angels," has been the support of all encouraging views of human character; while the language of humble penitence or of honest moral indignation has been made the evidence of doctrines such as this,—strange for their extravagance, and horrible for their signification.

I think this is a fair account, in general, of the way in which dogmas so monstrous and incredible as this of the total native depravity of man must have had their rise. It is held, as it were, from a vague feeling that it must be true, as making part and parcel of the Bible. No man would wish beforehand that it should be true. No one (except a cunning priesthood that loved it for the sake of the spiritual power it gave) could take any satisfaction in urging it on other minds, unless it were from the sincerest conviction that it was perilous not to believe and feel it. All our natural feelings rise up against it, as indeed, by the very terms of it, they must. Its very signifi-

cation is, that natural emotions and spontaneously formed opinions are necessarily and altogether wrong, — wrong, of course, by its standard of right and wrong. No man would *wish* to believe that a curse, infinitely more tremendous than any earthly doom of wretchedness, rested on him from his birth; or that his dear child, or parent, or friend, in passing from this mortal state, has almost inevitably fallen into inconceivable and hopeless torture. By the very terms in which such a doctrine is stated, all human sympathies and natural emotion must be utterly hostile to it. And at times these will assert their irresistible sway. Natural affection triumphs over theological prejudice, even in the coldest breast, when the statement is brought home to it, and becomes practical. The sternest bigot cannot see his infant dying, or his friend unconscious in the last hour, but his previous opinion must break down; and he cannot bring himself to think of any thing but a blessed immortality for those he loves. He cannot watch a child's careless sport, or receive its winning caress, and persuade himself that all is evil, and hateful to the eye of God. He may say so, but with a mental reservation that takes away the force of what he says. A blessed inconsistency makes the full and hearty reception of this central point of the Calvinistic creed for ever impossible to the mass of those professing it.

And so I need not harrow up your feelings, or excite your prejudice, by reciting the horrible conclusions that follow close upon the Orthodox statement of man's native guilt. I need not lead you through

the wearisome round of debate and quibble and inference, respecting the old theological questions that have been broached; — whether infants are inevitably damned if they die unregenerate, or may possibly all be saved, or (as this would make their longer life a peril and calamity) may not take their chance as elect or reprobate; whether baptism is a sufficient safeguard, and by whom it may be administered; whether the first conscious act is necessarily a sinful one, and incurs the penalty of infinite guilt; whether heathen men before the time of Christ, who acted up to their light, might possibly be saved; or whether the innumerable millions of human beings, who are falling off by thousands in a day, old men and babes, in pagan or Christian lands, are certainly (the great mass of them) lost for ever.

These and similar questions, only hinting at the frightful circle of ideas that men have been familiarized and hardened to in their theological debates, we may leave untouched. In dealing with a doctrine that implies the sternest answer to all of them, I seem to be combating, not a hearty and practical conviction of men in earnest, but only the ghost or shadow of what was once a terrible reality. The difficulty seems, not so much to disprove the theory as to account for it,— to explain how it ever came to exist in the human mind at all. Men believe in practice, now, only what is necessarily implied in their general system of religious thought. The remoter consequences are forgotten, or kept studiously out of sight; and a moderate though still harmful measure of belief lurks in their mind, because they take

it for granted, rather than because of any proof; because without it the whole theory they hold to would be impossible and absurd, rather than for any intrinsic merit that commends it to their minds. The statement and the refutation may be alike unsatisfactory; yet, as really a very necessary and important part of my course, I must present this subject in the best and most tangible shape I can.

Before we come to the reasoning employed in favour of this doctrine, I wish it may be distinctly fixed in our minds what, precisely, is its nature and meaning, and what sort of evidence it is which we may expect to find. Having done this, I shall next consider the insufficiency of the evidence with the erroneous style of interpretation on which it rests; and, finally, the evil consequences, intellectual and moral, that result from it.

I. The question is not about the amount of sin or guilt there may actually be in the world. Those who deny native depravity have often been accused of making too light of the fact of moral evil, of dwelling too much on the bright side of things, and winking out of sight the actual wickedness of men, for the sake of keeping a fair and smooth theory. Perhaps it has been so sometimes,—a very natural reaction from the over-statements on the other side. If human nature itself, which is the work of God, is pronounced altogether corrupt, it seemed no more than proper reverence to the Author of our being to vindicate his work, and call on men to remember the glorious capacity of their nature, even at the expense, for the moment, of overlooking the actual

corruption and degradation of it by their own fault. Still, they have never knowingly or intentionally confounded the eternal distinction between right and wrong, holiness and sin. It was never said of them that they were behind others in general practice of virtue, and they have certainly shown their full share of zeal in opposing vice and error,— only, vice and error when they saw them in a distinct and palpable shape. I believe that more humane legislation and actual reforms of social evils have had their root and strength in that class of thinkers, in proportion to their numbers, than in any ten others put together.

The real difference is not in *the feeling with which* we regard the fact of guilt, but in *the point of view from which* we regard it. The point of the Orthodox doctrine on the subject is, not that mankind is generally wicked and corrupt, but that it is altogether and absolutely so, and cannot, in the nature of things, except by miracle, be otherwise. This is the position which its advocates have chosen. They see the subject from the point of view of theological opinion, not from that of the natural reason and conscience; the guilt they speak of is not men's actual or apparent guilt, but their theological or constructive guilt. By the very terms of the theory, our natural sentiments of right and wrong cannot be trusted. In fact, where all is on one dead level of sin, there can be no real difference of right and wrong. The most amiable feeling, the most heroic self-devotion, the purest love of God and man and truth, or what seems so in the eye of reason and conscience, is just as likely to be deceitful, corrupt, and hateful in the

eye of God, as the most atrocious crime. There is no room left for subordinate moral distinctions.* All are lost and swallowed up in the one gulf of original depravity. All differences of faithful and treacherous, kind and cruel, generous and malignant, are melted down in that one stern judgment, pronounced without reservation or abatement on the entire human race — that "the wickedness of man is great in the earth, and that *every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually.*" To every age, to every nation, to every man, is applied without qualification that terrible description of the wickedness of the world before the flood.

Of course, evidence might be expected as peculiar and as strong as the assertion is overwhelming. One would say that on nothing less than proof positive and unequivocal — demonstration outweighing every doubt, crushing every scruple, superseding every other process of moral argument or experience — could he receive such a declaration as this for true. And we cannot have recourse to any of the ordinary ways of proving any other class of facts. By the very terms of the theory, we are warned that our moral sense is corrupt, our reason deceitful, all our faculties blinded and perverted by sin. So we cannot trust any natural mode of proof; for once to listen to reason on such a subject would be to begin by renouncing the theory in order to prove it, — to confide, for argument's sake, in the integrity of those very powers and faculties which we are assured beforehand are altogether deceitful and de-

*See below, page 141.

praved. The common sense of men is utterly at fault, and condemned before a hearing.

And our moral sense, our natural discrimination between right and wrong, will not serve us any better. The obscure consciousness of guilt, or personal unworthiness, which most men acknowledge, which all earnest men deplore, must pass for nothing, and cannot be introduced as proof. How should conscience be a safer guide than sense and passion, if the whole nature is depraved? If we may trust one sentiment, one faculty, why not all, or the nature we are born to as a whole? The theory itself, you will observe, drives us from every other possible method of proof than the extraneous evidence of theological doctrine. It cannot fairly and honestly appeal to any thing in the range of human philosophy or ordinary experience, because it first deprives us of the test to judge them by. And if it should, its case is gone; for, first, it deserts itself, by appealing to a tribunal forejudged to be worthless, and, next, the answer it gets from that tribunal is not such as it wants. The statement of reason is certainly very different from that of dogmatic theology. If there are germs of evil in man by nature, so there are also germs of good; for reason and conscience assure us of one full as much as of the other. He is no more pure tiger in innate capacity and tendency than he is pure angel. Nero was no more *a man* than Socrates or Howard. And, once granting the native *capacity* for spiritual life and culture, without which there is no possibility of any good on any theory, there seems very little left to contend about, but an empty form of words. So much for the answer of reason.

If, then, the theory is true, we can know it by no other method or faculty our Creator has given us, but only in the terms of a dogmatic statement. Its evidence is not rational or moral, but theological. If we believe it, it is either from the necessity of a system which requires it, and which we accept as proved on other grounds; or else from the most cogent, convincing, overwhelming evidence of inspiration. The Bible argument, then, ought certainly to be secure and impregnable. If we detect any weakness in it, any flaw, any thing detracting from absolute and unanswerable proof, we shall be forced to set it aside. Such a doctrine could be accepted on nothing less than such a demonstration. Whether the other parts of the Orthodox theory are sufficient to bear this out, we may judge from the argument touching them severally, or as a whole. At present I am dealing only with this single one, and the evidence alleged to sustain it. As I have said, this evidence must not be sought anywhere but in the Bible. And my purpose now is to examine what is the nature of this evidence, and what is its just interpretation.

II. In studying the language of the Bible, or any part of it, we certainly ought to consider the purpose for which it was written, and judge its meaning by that. Considering, then, that a large part of the Bible is in the form of very earnest moral appeal, or else of personal moral conviction and penitence,—that it almost always takes the point of view of conscience, made sensitive, too, by the most exalted standard of perfect right, and the highest activity of

the religious sentiment,— we may naturally expect to find very strong language used in reference to human guilt, whatever the particular theory which it intends to teach. Such confessions or appeals depend on temperament, or the present state of mind, far more than on any theological opinion. Moral reformers, for example, have in general the most complacent view of all men as to the native excellence and powers of mankind; and yet their very trade is to deal in the most bitter and sweeping rebukes of wrong. In sternness of denunciation, they often outdo anything that can be matched against them from the Bible. That is the very nature of the human mind, when the conscience is in active exercise in some single direction.

Now the Bible is one of the most natural and unsophisticated, in its tone of sentiment, of all books dealing with right and wrong, duty and sin; and its language in respect to human guilt is certainly very strong. But there is no cold-blooded and argumentative statement of man's depravity in the manner of theologians. Vehement and fiery, desponding, remorseful, reproachful, it may be by turns; but to use its scattered fragments to build a dogmatic theory of guilt is utterly to falsify its meaning. It will not bear such handling. To neglect the sentiment and retain the form, to forget the circumstances while we insist on the verbal statement, is as if we should carry the tone and manner of tragedy into a mathematical demonstration, or take for literal description all the splendid and diversified imagery by which the Scriptures set forth the power and glory of Almighty God.

But what is the actual and positive amount of proof that can be brought by constraint from the Bible pages to sustain the argument for the total native depravity of man? Six or eight passages in all are the only ones that would be relied on with any certainty; and the force of these will disappear at once, if we keep in mind the caution in interpreting which I have just been labouring to impress. I will take them up in order, but very briefly, and rather to show the outline than to discuss them with any fulness. And I cannot take the feebler ones, which may be used as illustration, but only the stronger ones, which are cited as proof. My object is not now to give a particular exposition of each, which would be mere repetition and weariness, but to show how they should be classified to make their application plain. They may be ranged in the three divisions which follow.

1. Those which speak of hereditary evil. It is commonly supposed, or taken for granted, that the narrative of Adam's fall contains the declaration that it entailed the corruption of nature and the ruin of mankind. So it does in Milton; but so it does not in Genesis. A glance at the passage will show that the most that can be made from it is the sentence to labour, disease, and liability to death. Not a syllable is breathed of any thing further than this, even where Paul comments on it afterwards, and says (Rom. v. 17) that "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." Nobody doubts that Adam sinned, and that all grown men since have sinned. That is not the point at issue. Neither

does any one acquainted with physiology doubt that moral tendencies are inherited by some organic law of descent; so that a bad man's child comes into life at a disadvantage, so to speak, and will not so easily reach so high a degree of virtue as another. These are facts of observation, not dogmas of a creed. And these are all that, by the most strained construction, can be fairly made out from any thing said in the Bible of Adam's sin. The disadvantage I spoke of is not guilt; it is mere misfortune, which is often made up in a hundred ways,— by some kind providence, by sentiments of pity and charity in other men towards the spoiled child of circumstance. A terrible misfortune it often is, a terrible warning always to a parent's sin,— but one which in the child a wise man will only pity, not condemn; and "shall mortal man be more just than God?" Try as you will, you cannot make any thing more than this from what the Scripture says of our hereditary guilt.

2. The next class is strong general descriptions of the moral condition of the world, or a particular nation, at some particular time. The first is that most emphatic one I quoted a little back, of the time before the flood, the lewd and insolent temper of which time was, in the writer's view, the reason and justification of that stupendous judgment. A similar description, more pathetically detailed, is given of Sodom and Gomorrah. In the same list we must include the striking objurgations of the Jewish prophets, whose point of appeal was made in bewailing or reproaching the idolatry and corruption of the declining Jewish state: as where Isaiah says

(i. 4), "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity"; or where Jeremiah says, in his sombre way (xvii. 9), "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" But incomparably the most striking passages of this sort, next after Jesus' denunciations of the hypocrites of his day, are those in which the Apostle Paul paints the corruption of the pagan world, to make more evident the moral need of such a faith as Christianity. These passages, chiefly in the Epistle to the Romans, are too well known to need repetition here. It is from him that such expressions as "there is none righteous," "children of wrath," "the understanding darkened," "the Scripture hath concluded all under sin," are chiefly taken; sufficiently emphatic and true as suiting his particular object of passionate remonstrance or appeal, but too high-wrought and sweeping to stand for a deliberate judgment or description of human nature as such, *which they never assume to be.* And as to all these, I think it must be evident enough that it would be unauthorized and unfair to insist on the literal rendering of every high-toned description or vehement rebuke, as containing a deliberate, positive, unanswerable matter of fact, equally true for all time, for every place, and for each particular man. For such a rendering there is no warrant in the terms of Scripture, no justification in reason or truth.

3. The remaining class consists of passages expressing personal emotion, of humility or contrition, with a few instances of gloomy moralizing. Thus David, in his penitential psalm (doubtless sincere),

after his base and atrocious conduct towards Uriah, when his conscience was roused and stung by his child's death and Nathan's bold rebuke, says (Ps. li. 5), "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me"; — bitterly true as the language of remorse and self-contempt, but monstrous as a charge to be laid indiscriminately at the door of every man. So the Preacher — assumed to be the sensual and idolatrous Solomon, who had so much more head-wisdom and less heart-wisdom than his father — says (Eccl. ix. 3), "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart," — seen chiefly in their weary chase for pleasure, and ambition that never fills the measure of its craving. Here, again, the words of Paul are more deep and earnest than any other, in the expression or interpretation of this sentiment. Especially in the chapter from which my text is taken, he speaks profoundly of the great moral conflict that goes on in the bosom of every earnest man,— the struggle from doubt and darkness towards light and peace. "I well know," he says, "that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but how to perform the good which I would I find not." Here is a statement which every man of deep moral experience will readily accept. No one supposes that in the flesh, that is, the natural propensities and desires, there is any moral merit, innocent or amiable as they may be in some of their forms. And every one knows, too, that it is a most high and difficult part of duty to contend with the excess or perversion of these very propensities and desires. They

do, indeed, make virtue difficult; but for that very reason they make it possible. For virtue consists in moral effort, in contending with a moral obstacle. And so far from being intrinsically depraved and corrupt, our natural constitution is only the point of departure, and the God-given condition, from which the spiritual life must proceed.

The strength of a man's natural passions is always mentioned as an extenuation of his faults, or an enhancing of his virtue,— never as intrinsically a matter of blame. The *reality* of the moral struggle and its necessity, not the absolute depravity of what causes it, is all that we can find contained in this well-known chapter. It is doubtless the story, rapidly told, of Paul's own inward history, representing (as Neander says) the class of sincere Pharisees. The blind groping and conflict with his own thoughts and doubts and temptations of the flesh are what he shared with all serious men of an imperfect faith, while longing for the pure and true; the peace he found in conviction is the result that is sure to crown the faithful striving of the soul, in the light and blessing of spiritual truth. Man's moral condition is powerfully and truly told; but it is one not of abject despair, not of rebellious hate,— only the mortal imperfection, the weary and protracted struggle, waiting the radiant light of immortality.

In these three classes may be ranged all the evidence from Scripture which has ever been brought to sustain the doctrine of man's original and total depravity. The strongest passages I have already quoted; and, once regarding them in their natural

connection, they certainly do not seem to me overstrained representations of human sin,— certainly very far from strong or explicit or numerous enough, even on the strictest theory of Scripture inspiration, to bear out such a doctrine as they are cited to prove. If an inspired note or comment were affixed to each several passage, to assure us that it was equally asserted of all men everywhere, and universally true of every grade of character, unless supernaturally changed or raised, there would be some show of reason for it. It would then be only essential to prove the inspiration of that comment. As it is, granting the very highest degree of inspiration to the Bible as we find it, it is totally inadequate to meet the case. The evidence fails here; and there is no other testimony we can call in to make it good.

III. I come now to the intrinsic objections to the theory, over and above the insufficiency of evidence. These objections are partly intellectual and partly moral. Let us give a few thoughts to each.

I have before spoken somewhat fully of the contradiction into which we fall when we presuppose man to be born into a rebellious or ruined state,— how we implicate the Divine character, and deny either his power and wisdom, that he could not prevent, or his mercy and justice, that he deliberately inflicted, so frightful a catastrophe upon the human race. And in the present discourse I have already spoken of the difficulty, nay, impossibility, of squaring any natural sentiments of justice or virtue, of right and wrong, with all the requisitions of this theory. In all this, I have taken for granted its

extreme and harshest form, neglecting the modifications which common sense and humanity have by degrees brought into it. I have hitherto considered only the stern and terrible dogma, as it was produced by the dark spirit of the Middle-Age theology; that which is reproduced in high-toned Calvinism, that which has been preached popularly in the churches of our own country, and is assumed in most popular religious treatises; that which fearlessly pronounces the entire and utter corruption of the natural man, and asserts that no one who has not received conversion can be saved from eternal woe. And I have done this, because it seems the only way to treat the doctrine fairly. To make any abatement in it seems to me virtually to abandon it. Those who maintain it in general terms, without being willing to admit its extreme consequences, are reduced to a miserable inconsistency. The alternative is simply between accepting or denying it. To accept it is to accept it all, with all its deficiency of proof, and all its mountain load of difficulties. To deny it is to desert the ground of Orthodoxy, and to make one's whole religious system proceed upon a different set of principles. This makes the intellectual difficulty that must for ever lie at the bottom of such a scheme, as I shall now proceed to show.

I am well aware that the advocates of the doctrine in name shrink from the application I have given it, and even protest against such extreme interpretation, as a piece of folly in their fellow-believers, or of unfairness in their opponents. They studiously avoid pronouncing positively on the doom of *all*

the unregenerate after death. They shudder at the declarations of old Calvinistic preachers, that hell is paved with infants' bones; and do not like to dwell too explicitly on the destination of heathen nations before or since the time of Christ. A humanizing process has been going on, and denunciations of the world's wickedness take more a moral and less a theological tone. Sin is deplored more as a fact, and dwelt on less as an inexpiable rebellion and curse. And the statements of the more enlightened defenders of the dogma are such as we should hardly refuse to accept ourselves. At most, we should consider them rather exaggerated descriptions of existing evil,—too unqualified, but in the main true. What we complain of is, that they should adhere to the dogma in form, which they virtually give up in fact.

Chalmers, for instance, complains of the exaggerations of the ultra Orthodox, and allows the existence of real virtue, disinterestedness, moral heroism, and pure love, distinct from the peculiar fact of conversion and regenerate life,—only saying that in such a case duty is not referred immediately to God, which may or may not be true, according to the circumstances of the case.

> Whether it be (he says) the kindliness of maternal affection, or the unweariedness of filial piety, or the earnestness of devoted patriotism, or the rigour of unbending fidelity, or any other of the recorded virtues which shed a glory over the remembrance of Greece and of Rome,—we fully concede . . . that they one and all of them were

sometimes exemplified in those days of heathenism; and that, out of the materials of a period, crowded as it was with moral abominations, there may also be gathered things which are pure, and lovely, and just, and true, and honest, and of good report.

And here, I presume, he only makes the concession and presents the modification of the Orthodox dogma which would be very widely accepted among its advocates. But when such allowances as these are made, we put the following question: Do you consider these natural distinctions of right and wrong as real or as delusive? If they are delusive, then they are the worst, most fatal evidence of depravity, and it is the grossest mockery to call them by the name of good at all. If they are real, then they must be real in the eye of God as well as ours; and we cannot suppose he would judge them more harshly and scrupulously than we. Then there is the real distinction of right and wrong, aside from any theological category; and a just God will reward the right and punish the wrong, irrespective of any such criterion. And, if we have already a basis of moral judgment irrespective of the supernatural work of grace, it follows inevitably that grace is only to complete and perfect the work which nature has already begun,—that is, which is begun, not in the scornful, impious, passionate nature of a bad man, but in the sincere effort, the love of holiness and truth, the upright and conscientious nature, of a good man. And in this we have stated, in so many words, the whole theory of liberal Christianity.

Thus it is in vain to modify the excessive harshness of the dogma, and plead for its milder form. The least concession yields the entire ground. The smallest abatement or reservation is fatal to its intrinsic and essential meaning. And no departure can be made from the downright and sweeping assertions of the old-school Orthodox, who confound on purpose all moral distinctions naturally existing, and swallow up all natural right and wrong, hate and love, in one horrid gulf of total depravity,— without changing wholly the dogmatic force of the theory, and coming down to a simple exaggeration, more or less highly coloured, of the actually existing evil in the world. And this, as I have said, is by no means a point of controversy. It depends wholly on the keenness of one's moral sense, or the breadth of his observation, not on the exigencies of his particular religious creed. The alternative involves one's whole conception of the Christian religion.

I might dwell on other ethical absurdities that result from this doctrine. Thus, for argument's sake, a man may be conceived as all wrong,— that is, by some standard presupposed in the general sense of right and wrong; but these being relative terms, and each involving its opposite, it would be nonsense to deny the existence of such a standard, and still retain the terms. In other words, as right and wrong are moral distinctions, how can they exist where there is nothing to distinguish? Again, there is no one to whom this can be an available category of wrong, even suppose it true; for to the unregenerate there is no capacity to receive its truth, and to

the regenerate it of course no longer applies. And again, if it were true, it defeats itself, and renders religion impossible except by miracle, and religious appeal consequently absurd,— useless to those not converted, and needless to those who are.

But I must pass all these by, and hasten to say a few words of its moral effect. And here we must always distinguish sharply between the religious conviction and the dogmatic opinion. There is a saving efficacy in the religious spirit, which seems to keep the temper and character from the harm that would naturally come from a false point of faith. Where it is the feeling of personal contrition that quickens the sense of general depravity, then we know that this is part of God's way of dealing with the soul, and trust the experience will have its perfect work. Or where, as in the missionary, it is the impulse and nerve of devoted and zealous action to save some from a lost and perishing race, then the religious feeling gives an actual practical trust in men's capacity, and patience in dealing with their faults, which may well put to shame the lagging zeal of those of a more complacent faith.

But there are evils on the other side. Among those who do not enter into that spirit, who have not those religious sympathies or that healthy tone of religious life, the sweeping theological declarations of the depravity and corruption of mankind cannot do any thing but mischief. They do not have the effect to bring such to feel or acknowledge their own deficiencies, while they do succeed in blunting, or imbittering, or rendering suspicious, their feelings

towards the mass of their fellow-men. At best, it is a strained and exaggerated tone of feeling, which cannot be kept up long without hurting the health of mind and conscience. The terrible view it presents of God and providence, if sincerely held, must strike heaven and earth with a curse. We cannot entertain the right sentiment of affectionate reverence towards a Being who is made responsible for such a state of things. Our selfish fear of being included in the all but universal doom,—our personal and selfish sense of gratitude, when we think we are saved from it without any merit of our own, to the exclusion of a multitude of others at least equally deserving with ourselves,—cannot be the right foundation for a healthful, manly, cheerful piety, which is the highest condition of the religious mind.

And, if we at all take in the force and meaning of the doctrine we profess, we must be appalled and overpowered with continual gloom, to think of that dreadful curse, resting on all God's creatures, which we can do nothing at all, which God himself will do comparatively so little, to remove. The thought of the Creator loses one of the chief motives it should include, to move our love and reverence. When we think of him as the highest Good, as naturally allied to and infinitely expanding in his nature those germs of good which we are conscious of in ourselves or one another, then he is the God our soul naturally seeks and loves. But to blot over these distinctions, and to make all ideas of right and duty depend (as they must) simply on the arbitrary dictates of an inexorable and capricious Will, is to abolish the only

distinction conceivable between God and Fate, and to dry up the most abundant fountain of spiritual life in the soul.

And, finally, this substituting of a theological or constructive responsibility for the simple, sound, moral sense of an enlightened mind is to strike at the root of all natural principles of right. It must steel the heart against human sympathies, beget an unconquerable suspicion, alienate men in mutual crimination and distrust; and so weaken that natural bond of faith in men generally, which is the real and substantial foundation of all human duty and human intercourse. Even if it has not this effect in its sincere advocates, yet by their defence of it they put a formidable weapon into the hands of bad men. It is telling them in plain terms that there is no difference between them and other men, unless supernaturally changed; that they are following the dictate and carrying out the plan given in their natural constitution; that nothing but a selfish fear, which is as bad as selfish passion, and perhaps meaner, prevents other men from being in all respects as bad as they. It cuts off all natural ground for hope, and all motive for moral effort, and challenges their scoffing and resentful scrutiny, to ascertain whether the virtues of the elect and regenerate do, after all, differ so completely from what is called depravity and corruption in the non-elect. And if there should be the smallest flaw in the virtue of these others, any trace of inferior and selfish motive, any relaxation of the purest moral principle, what would follow but an utter and complete denial of all virtue and all difference of right and wrong?

This radical moral skepticism, this infidelity of the heart, is the worst moral disease that can befall a man. And nothing seems more certain to lead men into it, than first to assure them that naturally they are capable of no good thing, and that their imperfection is total depravity in the eye of God, and then to offer them the example of just the same imperfection — a little modified, perhaps, but not very palpably different in kind — as the only substitute. The other extreme, of bigotry, and merciless persecution of those whom God is supposed to have deserted and cursed, I need not dwell on now. At the present day we do not see so much of it, or in its coarser forms. But this moral skepticism, which knows no holiness in duty, no loftiness of aim, no difference of right and wrong, is warning enough against a system which declares beforehand that in man's natural estate there is and can be nothing to correspond to these judgments of our moral sense.

Such a system we find in the Orthodox doctrine of total native depravity. As we have seen, its evidence is uncertain and unsound; its full signification is so frightful, that its best advocates are gradually recoiling from it in alarm; and its whole character is calculated to bewilder the simple, stimulate the bad, and sow the seeds of radical and utter skepticism as to all moral and religious truth. Such is the doctrine which has too long held its place as the foundation of Christian ethics. We rejoice to think it is giving way, though slowly, before the light of a better reading of human life.

DISCOURSE VII.

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

HE THAT SOWETH TO HIS FLESH SHALL OF THE FLESH REAP CORRUPTION; BUT HE THAT SOWETH TO THE SPIRIT SHALL OF THE SPIRIT REAP LIFE EVERLASTING.—Gal. vi. 8.

I HAVE now examined, one by one, the several doctrines of Orthodoxy, as they bear on the Divine economy generally, the nature of God, and on the moral conditions under which we live. A further point remains: that, namely, which refers to the destination of mankind in the future world. No nation of men has ever existed which did not believe, more or less clearly, in another life. No system of religion has ever been taught, which did not have some answer as to this topic of solemn and awful inquiry. And our purpose now is to inquire, What answer does Orthodoxy give, and with what sort of anticipations does it bid men look forward to the unseen world? What evidence does it offer to sustain its assertions, and what are the merits and advantages of the view which it presents?

In answer to these questions we may say, in brief, that the Orthodox doctrine of the future world is of a piece with the whole system of which it forms a part. Its style of assertion is the same; the nature

of its evidence is the same; and the intrinsic objections which we have found lying against the other features of the scheme apply here in equal or added strength. What that doctrine is in general, I have implied or asserted all along. I have shown how the very nature of the scheme under review requires endless perdition to be presupposed of the natural condition of the human race; and that this idea must be held, in all its strictness, as offering the only motive for Christ to make, or man to accept, the sacrifice of atonement. As it is essential to the significance of the scheme throughout, so it makes its fitting crown and consummation. It forms the point of appeal in all the representations of that style of theology; it is very confidently supposed to be proved by the explicit terms of Scripture; and by its vague terror it doubtless does very much to perpetuate the hold of that system upon the general mind. Respecting a doctrine so tenaciously held, so vehemently urged, our investigation should be serious and deliberate. I ask your attention, therefore, to a careful inquiry as to its character and its proof.

The nature of my argument, appealing in the severest manner to reason, and not to passion or imagination, does not allow me to prejudice you beforehand with highly-wrought statements of what the popular idea of hell implies. I should be sorry to offend your taste by descriptions that to me are simply repulsive and barbarous. I am willing not to hold the majority of Orthodox believers responsible for such pictures of the future world; to regard

them merely as the imagery, coarse, revolting, and grotesque, by which a certain class of minds have sought to express a sincere dread of sin, and an honest sense of the penalty it deserves. As you know, many persons make free use of such imagery, without remorse or scruple. Taking the hint from some figurative descriptions in Scripture, they have accumulated unsparingly material images of horror. And not unfrequently they have deliberately tried to harrow up men's feelings, by drawing on their fancy for exaggerated comparisons of the supposed tortures of hell with those of racks, flames, and the horrible enginery of the Inquisition; or else have outraged their affection, by declaring that God so schools and disciplines the minds of the saints in glory, that part of the joys of heaven will be to witness the infinite and hopeless agonies of the damned.

All appeals and descriptions such as these, though still included in the coarse popular representations of Christianity, I shall dismiss with very few words of comment. They simply show a morbid and distempered condition of the mind. Their plainest statement is their plainest refutation. They are heathen in their origin and barbarous in their spirit. Reduced to their plain meaning, and taken in connection with the other kindred doctrines of election, predestination, and natural depravity, they are bald and shocking blasphemy, without a parallel in any system of paganism that the world has known. Heathen religions have indeed represented a jealous and remorseless deity as exacting to the uttermost

the hardest penalty they could conceive; but even they scarce dared deliberately to sum up the full meaning of the word *eternal*, as applied to such a doom, and, above all, they never committed the tenfold horror of ascribing it to a perfect God. A deity treacherous, licentious, cruel, cowardly, and in terror for his throne, might be imagined capable of exacting such a penalty, if he had the power; for to such a one there was no need of pretending it to be right. It was reserved for the incongruous blending of the worst horror of pagan superstition with the Christian theory of an infinite and perfect God, to affirm and justify such a sentence as that, passed on a large majority of the human race.

One word more, that we may have fairly done with the extreme and revolting form in which this doctrine has been held. The moral argument against it, as soon as it is once announced, is so strong and imperative, as utterly to overbear any possible attempt at proof. It is useless to talk of evidence for a proposition so intrinsically frightful and incredible. Insist as you will upon strict interpretation of the Christian Scriptures; still, to a healthy mind that knows what it is about, it is only to present a plain alternative. Granting the authority of the record, there must be some mistake about its meaning. Granting the accuracy of the interpretation, there must be some fault in the authority. I cannot suppose it possible that any man can seriously maintain that any writing or tradition whatsoever, never so imposingly vouched or implicitly received, should be able, in the name of God, to overthrow all ideas

of his mercy or justice or power, as such a doctrine must do. Cover it over with what phraseology we will,—putting out of sight just now all the bearing it may have on us individually as men,—the statement is a flat declaration that God has failed in the great purpose of his creation, and in spite of his wisdom, omnipotence, and love, he has been unable to make the universe in great part any thing but a wreck, a dungeon, a house of torture, an eternal monument of his baffled will and vindictive wrath. A sound mind, say what we will, cannot agree to such a statement; and the more closely the argument for it is pressed, the more evident is the way of escape —if that is the only one—to infidelity. I should feel humiliated to use any other argument in reference to it than this one appeal to your honest sense of right and wrong.

I am willing to believe that the real meaning of those who contend for the Orthodox doctrine of retribution is different from the gross and material view which we have been considering. Even here I have said nothing of the physical absurdity involved in the idea of the two separate, eternal kingdoms of absolute bliss and woe,—the material heaven, with its continual light and music and its pavement of trodden gold; the material hell, with flame and chains and instruments of horrid torture. I have spoken only of the moral idea contained; and this, in great measure, applies to every form in which the doctrine of vindictive punishment can be held. Still, I will grant its defenders the benefit of the admission, that they do not intend strictly the two

visible and outward regions of happiness and torment; that they regard the material images as symbols of a spiritual fact; and that the chastisement and vengeance of guilt they speak of are inflicted on the living spirit, not the organized frame, and in virtue of laws deep and fundamental in the constitution of the soul itself. This is a great, and to many will appear a dangerous admission for my argument; but, in spite of it, I shall hope to make that good.

This much, then, of spiritual meaning, I consider to be essentially involved in the Orthodox dogma, when stripped of its material imagery: that the penalty for sin is absolute and final, affecting the everlasting condition of the soul; that it has no object to serve in the possible reformation of the offender, and no respite to hope from Divine justice; that there is not only the moral retribution of all wrong which the reason knows and the conscience feels, and which in some degree affects all men, good or bad, but that there is superadded to this an arbitrary and inexpiable doom, when the sum of a man's offences has reached a certain point; that in the laws of the Divine government there is in strictness of speech an "unpardonable sin," of which the penalty is "eternal death"; that the chastisement of conscience, the agony of remorse, is not for warning, but for vengeance; and that, though repentance were conceivable, it must go on hopelessly aggravated without end, a blank and pitiless and fruitless horror; and, in fine, that all we know on earth of the stings of self-condemnation

and reproach, of terror at one's own haunting accuser in his conscious heart, of the unspeakable agony of soul which makes guilty men choose the shame of exposure and the punishment of human laws and the countenance of the Eternal Judge before their silent conviction of wrong, is but a type of the penalty in store for the future world, where God *arbitrarily* imposes it as the final doom of man's guilt. This, I say, is involved necessarily in the Orthodox dogma, and is supposed by many to be involved in the very fact of sin. And I present it thus, apart from images of a morbid fancy, and apart from the aggravation of making it the doom of simple unbelief, that we may be clear and untrammelled in speaking of it. The only points we have now to consider are its *evidence* and its intrinsic *character.* Under these two heads I shall comprehend what I have to say of my reasons for rejecting it.

I. The evidence of a doctrine that concerns so nearly the fundamental laws of our moral constitution ought to be most severely scrutinized, and to abide all investigation clear and unimpeachable. It is in this character, as professing to pronounce with authority, on grounds wholly different from those on which scientific or philosophic truth is established, that we should view it very critically. The philosophical belief of some men, it is true, is very similar to the substance of this doctrine; but in their case it rests on the reading of their moral consciousness, and may be confirmed or overthrown by a profounder method of philosophy. Not so with this. It rests on evidence extrinsic, and outwardly

binding. It is sustained on authority,— the authority of texts and their interpretation. Comprising a philosophy of sin, its proof is critical and Scriptural, not philosophical. Of the essential idea I shall speak more fully towards the close of my remarks, and state my objections generally to this view of sin and its consequences. At present my purpose is to show that it is not necessarily implied, or positively taught, in the words of the Christian Scriptures. The burden of proof being thrown upon that side, I wish to show that the evidence is not strong enough to bear it.

The Bible evidently all along assumes the *fact* of retribution, or actual punishment of sin; and this in the future world as well as the present, heightened, too, by all the conscience may suggest as to our desert, and by all the imagination may represent of a condition stripped of the defences and disguises that shield and cover guilt in the present life. Indeed, this seems a necessary part of our moral constitution. Once presuming the immortality of the soul, that is, the continuance of our conscious being, we cannot possibly divorce it from the consequences of cherished wrong. If there is a future life, it must bear the impress of the present. The soul passes over to that state such as it has become during its probation here. Memory, if nothing more, must be an indissoluble bond between the two spheres of being. Abolish memory, and to all intents and purposes you abolish the soul itself. Cut off the communion of consciousness between this life and that to come, and you cut off all connection of the vital principle

as completely as, by damming up a stream, you destroy its flow or compel it to start afresh. It is another stream then, and not the same, though the water may be identical. Now it is the peculiarity of all religious language, that it is profoundly imbued with this idea of the indissoluble consciousness of the moral life. It places its motive in the future, because to it that is as the present. It bids us act for another life, because to it that is all one with this, and equally near. And it would be impossible to frame a religious statement, exhortation, or appeal, addressed to our moral nature, that should not, in express terms or by clear implication, involve the certainty of moral retribution, in clearness and strength proportioned to the earnestness of the sentiment or appeal itself.

This is precisely what we find throughout in the language of the Bible. What have been taken as threatenings or positive statements of the sinner's future doom may be considered (if we please) simply as forebodings of the human consciousness, deeply impressed with the reality of the future state. I do not say at present that this is their only meaning; but for my immediate purpose it may be regarded as their essential meaning. That is, whatever else the language of Scripture may imply, it certainly does manifest a most deep and lively and solemn sense of the reality of the great fact of moral retribution,—a fact eternally true, involved in the first elements of our moral nature, and working perpetually to the reward or punishment of every act and thought. In the words of the passage from which my text

is taken, "God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting." I do not deem it necessary to say any thing more of the general tone of Scripture language, than that it is pervaded out and out by this profound moral consciousness, and that it certainly employs the very strongest terms in speaking of the penalty that impends over human sin. So far as it concerns the reality of retribution, in this world or the world to come, the common-sense interpretation seems the only true or possible interpretation.

But when we go beyond the simple fact, and come to descriptions of the nature and mode of the penalty for sin, we must guard against being misled by phrases of speech which indicate merely the mental habits and associations of those who use them. A certain style of imagery is used in many parts of the Scriptures, alluding, as every scholar knows, to local customs and memories; and out of this have been framed most of the popular notions on the subject. Such words as "Hell" (*Gehenna*), "the worm that dieth not" and "the fire that is not quenched," from which most of the usual phrases and descriptions are derived, were not used at first in any thing like the strict dogmatic, technical meaning they afterwards came to bear. It is to be observed that the phraseology is not Christian, but Jewish. It is addressed, not to Christians generally, but to Jews. It occurs a few times in the Gospels, where Jesus is warning

Jews of the certain consequences of obstinate guilt, and where he uses the well-known forms of speech found in the Prophets and other Hebrew writers, and once besides in the Epistle of James, Bishop of Jerusalem,— never once in the writings of either John or Paul. In by far the larger portion of the Testament, the language used to express the fact of retribution applies only (or most readily) to the spiritual law that makes sin the death and curse of the soul. In a very few passages, this is impressed and enlarged on by the familiar Jewish images of horror to which I have alluded.

Thus there are two Greek words rendered "Hell." One, *Hades*, signifies simply the grave, or the gloomy realm of death, as when Jesus says Capernaum shall be "brought down to hell," *i.e.* death or ruin. The other, *Gehenna*, is the Greek for "vale of Hinnom,"— a place alluded to several times in the Old Testament. It was a valley near Jerusalem, desecrated to the religious memory by the ancient sacrifices made in barbarous times to Moloch, the god of war. Little children were scorched to death in the arms of a brazen idol, or burned in the fire that blazed at his feet, while drums beat to drown the horrid cries of mother and babe. Hence the valley was called Tophet, or "the drum,"—afterwards the vale of Hinnom, or Gehenna; and this is translated "Hell," which is a word in the old Scandinavian mythology having precisely the same meaning as the Greek word Hades, *i.e.* realm of the departed. The refuse of the temple sacrifice, and the unburied bodies of malefactors, were cast out there to be consumed by

the never-dying worm, or burned in the perpetual fire. And since it stood to the Jewish mind for the image of all horror and impurity, both from its frightful associations of old and the ghastly sight it offered now, it formed the most appropriate and striking hint of the spectacle of a thoroughly corrupt and guilty soul. Interpreting it in the strictest sense, we might give its spiritual meaning thus: that the flames of this ghastly and sombre valley, consuming the loathsome impurity of the relics of death, are but the type of that avenging and purifying fire of the conscience that never dies, burning out the foul and cherished corruption of a bad heart. That is, it will bear this meaning full as well as any other. We cannot strictly and literally, but only by dim and remote analogies, interpret such imagery into a trustworthy spiritual sense.

And this general remark applies equally well to the language of the Apocalypse ("Revelation"), which at first sight seems even more awful and explicit, but which in fact is substantially the same, except that its sea of fire and brimstone seems borrowed from the Greek and Roman descriptions of Tartarus, rather than from any Hebrew sources. Italy is a volcanic country; and the familiar imagery of Roman writers in reference to the "world below" is taken (as is well known) from the ordinary phenomena of such a country. And it is worth while to observe that this book is addressed to Christians under Roman power, perhaps in Rome itself, and suffering under Roman persecution. A glance will show the difference of its style from any thing that was ever addressed to Jews.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus furnishes another example of the Scripture style. Its evident intention is, to show the utter mockery and futility of the outward distinctions and gaudy shows of the world, which most excite men's ambition, desire, and rivalry. The proud rich man and the poor leprous beggar meet face to face before the equal eye of God and of eternity, and the only distinction held valid there is that which stamps the one good, the other bad, morally; and the most touching thing of all is the humiliation and abasement which that proud heart acknowledges. Beyond this we cannot go with any certainty. As to the general air and phraseology, they are very much such as one meets in citations from old Jewish apologues and commentaries, which contain so large a proportion of the recorded Hebrew thought. Such incidents and scenes, introducing the patriarchs and personages of the Old Testament, have always made a staple of the moral instruction of the Jews, and, I believe, do still. A grave, traditionary, legendary people, with a stronger sense of religious and ritual law than of accurate history, their mind delights in clothing every moral thought or point of instruction in the antiquated garb of the most remote age. Into the scenes and retributions of the life to come they still introduced the same familiar personages as characters in the same class of moral apologues. Abraham and Moses, the patriarchs and prophets, personify the existences of the future, as of the past and present, moral world. And this mental characteristic accounts fully, I think, for the outward and peculiar features of a parable ad-

dressed to them. It cannot be literally and precisely interpreted, without great confusion and even absurdity of thought. It cannot be carried much beyond the plain and simple hint already given, without disturbing our ideas of an equitable retribution, and injuring the simplicity there should be in our view of the spiritual world. Jesus meant to teach quite a different lesson, than to let in our human glance to rest on the mysteries of futurity. We receive the lesson, illustrated and impressed by the imagery and style most familiar to his hearers' minds; and beyond that we do not care to go.

I think enough has now been said to show the impossibility of reasoning strictly from the terms of any imagery in the Testament, as to positive facts in the condition of the future world. Indeed, for purposes of argument, it is not too much to say that the whole field is narrowed down to one point, the interpretation of a single word. This is the word, or kindred words, so often rendered *eternal*, or *everlasting*, or *eternity* (ἀιών, αἰώνιος).* The same expression is used of the life and of the death of the soul in the future state; and the most valid and plausible argument is, that we have as much reason to expect un-

* There need be no dispute as to the *etymological* meaning of this word, which is generally understood to be "always-existing," though some hold it to be, originally, a participle of the verb "to breathe." The real question is, whether or not it may be used in a *popular* sense; as in the line

"A thing of beauty is a joy *for ever*," —

that is, as long as the memory or impression of it lasts. So, too, when it is said (Rev. xiv. 11) that "the smoke of their torment goeth up *for ever and ever*" (lit., "for ages of ages"), no doubt the thought is of endless duration; but whether as more than a poetic hyperbole (as in the phrase "the everlasting mountains" in Hab. iii. 6), is the very thing to be proved.

ending torture on the one hand as unending blessedness on the other. The same word is used for both, and we have no authority to distinguish between them, and make this mean everlasting, and that limited in duration. Concerning this — the centre and sum of the reasoning for eternal punishment — we may remark a few things.

First, if the soul is immortal by nature, and indestructible in essence, we do not need to make the distinction spoken of. We say that sin in the course of time will probably be outgrown and purged away; while the soul lives for ever, in virtue of its inherent immortality. Any other shade of meaning that will fit the sense, and can be shown to belong to the word, may be employed, and the true doctrine of the future life is not touched on or impaired.

Next, granting to this word the strict meaning "everlasting" in many passages, it does not follow that this is the only meaning. In two to one of the places where it is found, it must at any rate refer to what is transitory and not everlasting,— usually, some particular "period" of time. It is quite optional with us, then, in what sense we will understand it of the penalty of guilt. At most, it can only be made out that the same expression is used in speaking of this, which is also used in some cases to express duration without end; but we have not the least hint, except from our general way of viewing the subject, as to the sense in which we shall take it there. And so, in strictness, our argument fails us at the very point where it was to be applied.

And, once more, this word, so far form bearing the

test of rigid critical investigation, becomes vague and undecided, and unfit to bear the pressure of the dogma that is built upon it. It breaks down under the weight, or it dissipates from its compactness and consistency, and becomes unfit to be used for such a purpose. When looked at through the glass of scientific criticism, instead of retaining its sharp marks and boundaries, like a crystal, it expands into something vague and cloudy, like a nebulous star, which to the eye seems distinct enough, but a blur comes on it when looked at through a telescope. In its first sense, it meant "a human lifetime," but with special reference to "the breath of life." * It is at least an open question, whether its essential meaning is "always existing" or "spiritually existing"; and therefore it cannot be used with any confidence as an argument. In strictness of speech, it does not show the punishment of sin to be *eternal*, but speaks of it as affecting the very life, the vital principle of the soul itself. It leaves us free to reason as we will of the ultimate consequences of guilt; meanwhile warning us, in the most solemn and emphatic manner, of the harm that is wrought in the degradation, the corruption, the bondage, the torture, of the living spirit that has harboured the evil thing. *The life of the soul*, not the duration of the term of its chastisement, is the idea conveyed by the most strict and accurate rendering of this phrase.

Without going more minutely into the critical discussion of words and phrases, I think we have

* Thayer's N. T. Lexicon.

found enough to assure us confidently of the following result: — that we are not entitled to interpret literally, or press very closely, the language of parables or imagery addressed to Jews and pagans; that the phraseology of the Testament, so far as it can be relied on to prove anything as to future punishment, is reduced to the exposition of a single word, and that this word, so far from sustaining the Orthodox idea, is at best uncertain and variable in its meaning, and in all probability refers to an entirely different order of thought. So that, at the end of our inquiry, we find ourselves at the same liberty as at first (even on the strictest view of Scripture inspiration) to interpret sin and its penalty according to our best and highest thought in general as to religious things. Let us consider, then, briefly, the *character* of the doctrine we are reviewing, and how far it may be superseded by a more spiritual view.

II. The habit of regarding the retribution of the future life as simply penal in its nature and strictly endless in duration has given rise to a way of thinking on the subject which is both false and hurtful: false, because it contradicts what we seem to know most clearly of the moral constitution of the soul; and hurtful, because it obscures our view of natural justice, the true character of sin, and the attributes of a perfect God. Of many wrong and strange notions on kindred topics I have spoken distinctly enough before. But there are others which belong peculiarly to the subject under review; and as Christianity has been made responsible for so many errors, it seems essential to show its intrinsic harmony with the

highest views we can gain respecting all matters connected with the spiritual life.

The first is, that the generally received opinion of punishment arbitrarily affixed to guilt, and having no reference to possible contrition and amendment, has blinded men very much to the natural and necessary consequences of guilt. The whole doctrine of retribution, as wrought out by the essential laws of our moral nature, has been overlaid and falsified. Hence have arisen confusion and error without measure. For instance, while no one has thought of positively denying such retribution, it has been left to physiologists or philosophers to illustrate, and cast aside entirely from men's religious opinion, as if it had no place there. *The penalty of sin* has been supposed to be arbitrary, having nothing to do with the terms and conditions of the present life, but superadded to these, and referred exclusively to another world. And hence a profound skepticism among many as to the very fact itself. Sin has been held to belong only to the present life and the bodily organization; and the profound connection that must always subsist between this and the spiritual world, in virtue of our personal identity, has been denied or overlooked. On the one hand, presuming on the goodness of God, it has been said he could not inflict arbitrary and endless, aimless pain; so that one who succeeds in drowning conscience here, and shuffles along through life in reckless guilt, escapes all consequences: he has nothing to dread in the life to come, and enters that unseen state on a perfect equality, in every spiritual privilege, with the noblest, purest, and best

of men,— of course destroying utterly all vital connection between this life and the other, and making that virtually an arbitrary new creation. On the other hand, men have been encouraged to think that on certain set conditions, by penance or peculiar personal experience, the most corrupt and hardened wretch can be miraculously made anew, and put on an equal level in an instant with the most glorious saints in light. It is hard to say which view is more fatal to a sound feeling of moral responsibility, or more dangerous in the temptation it holds out to daring guilt.

Another error into which men have been led by this doctrine is that they talk vaguely of sin in the abstract and the "infinite" punishment it deserves, instead of soberly looking at the fact, and graduating their judgment of it by the degrees of real guilt. The futility of all attempts to reason out a doctrine by postulates of what is infinite has been, I trust, sufficiently illustrated and exposed before.* We cannot with any safety reason from what to our mind appears as infinite. If we say that human sin deserves an "infinite" degree of punishment, because committed against a Being of absolute power and perfection, it follows just as clearly, from the same postulate, that human virtue deserves infinite reward. And since probably no man is without his virtues and no man is without his faults, it follows that the two infinites cancel each other, and there is left to judge men by only the finite element, which is the act or the motive for which each one feels himself

*Page 112.

personally responsible. And so the whole doctrine, as to its philosophical basis, is swept away.

Besides, it is not true that the conscience, any more than the reason, acknowledges strictly infinite degrees of guilt. At most it is only a popular form of speech, the force of which disappears as soon as we measure it by any, the simplest test. To show my meaning more plainly by an historical example. Robert, the eldest son of William the Norman, conqueror of England, was a bold, fierce, cruel man; and for many years was in commission of the most barbarous, revolting, and unpardonable crime that perhaps a man can commit,— that is, fighting in deadly hate and conflict with his own father and brothers, fiercely and relentlessly trampling down the rights, happiness, and liberties of the people dependent on his mercy. It was a cruel and parricidal family, and the fashion of war in those days was savage and unmerciful. Once he was only prevented by accident from taking his own father's life. Now it happened afterwards that he was captured by his own brother, Henry the First of England, and put in prison; and failing in the attempt to escape, his brother had him more closely guarded, and both his eyes burnt out with a pan of heated brass. And so he remained in prison, blind and miserable, till about the age of eighty years. Now I say that, in any case that appeals like this to our imagination and human feeling,— when we consider the long and dreary lapse of time, the old man's whitening hairs and decaying strength, the fierce play of baffled passion, the bitter memory of the past,— we unavoidably feel

that, for mere vengeance, tenfold has been exacted for any amount of previous crime; and our abhorrence of his misdeeds is lost in our execration of the savage tyranny of his gaoler. This is a strong case, both of guilt and its apparent penalty; but consider how far it falls short of the least of the horrors in the popular idea of hell,—how far more mild and merciful his doom than that which theologians say is inflicted on simple unbelief, by an inexorable and angry God! Then, again, consider how brief and fragmentary human life is at best. Nero and Commodus, two of the worst of the Roman emperors, whose names stand for all that is monstrous, inhuman, profligate, and tyrannical, perished each at about the age of thirty. Some monsters of wickedness have been not much more than diseased children. There is no such thing possible as to frame in our imagination the idea of crime such as to deserve *infinite* punishment, coolly and easily as we may state it in the language of our creeds.

But my final and strongest objection to the doctrine under review is, that it misstates and falsifies the real essence and purpose of retribution. It is not for the purpose of inflicting vengeance, but for the sake of *rousing the moral consciousness*, that God has affixed so dread and terrible consequences to human guilt. As soon as the retribution begins to work, we see its moral meaning plain enough. It is only before it begins to work, while the mind seems obstinately to brace itself against it, that we feel higher and higher degrees of it to be deserved,—deserved, because required. Vengeance is turned to pity at

the first symptom of relenting. And this, by all the analogies we have, seems to be the signification of moral pain. All suffering, so far as we can trace it out and be sure we understand it, is either disciplinary and remedial, or else the symptom, and therefore the merciful warning, of disease. To these two classes it may all be reduced. It is never without its use. The nerve of sensation is the sentinel of the citadel of life. The vital parts themselves have not the feeling of pain, but only the avenues of approach to them. It would be wanton torture if those were susceptible, which being once touched, the life itself is gone irrecoverably; and the agony of the most violent disease is only the result of what in its first intention was most kind and merciful.

So it is in the natural world; and so we may safely reason over to the spiritual world. We are justified in assuming that suffering of any sort ends not with itself; and that to all men there is the certainty, or at any rate the possibility, of recovery to health. Bodily diseases yield before scientific skill, though only to a limited degree, since the body itself is mortal; and the soul that can never die must be capable always of restoration to moral life. "The wages of sin is death": not torture without end, which would be frightful and wanton cruelty, but the loss and decay of vital force. How near we may approach to brute unconsciousness and moral death, we know not. The Scripture speaks of those "whose conscience is seared as with a hot iron," so that they have apparently lost, for a time at least, the sense of pain. But, in the infinite resources of

God's providence, in the prevailing power of his spirit, which enfolds the soul more nearly in the spiritual world, we may never dare say absolutely and finally that there is no hope. And, as returning pain is a sign of returning animation, and so a source of hope,— as the first favourable symptom in the treatment of a drowning or swooning man is a pain far more sharp and bitter than any that preceded his loss of consciousness,— so, in the possible recovery from moral or spiritual death, deep mortification and shame, and the sharp agony of grief, are far more favourable symptoms than the numbness and stupor of the moral sense that went before.

Not for unavailing torture, but for life and hope, does God visit the offending soul with the stings of chastisement and remorse. Not that he will put salvation upon us from without, or urge on us a compulsory restoration; but that, to a being endowed with moral freedom, the choice must in the nature of things be always open; the great alternative of right or wrong must always lie before him. And, whatever the visitation of pain and mental agony, it is always a sign that the soul is there; and it may be an effectual, as it is a merciful, warning to summon it back to holiness. Stern and bitter as may be the penalty,— inevitably the consequence and avenger of sin,— it is never so bitter but that it may be kindly meant, and the good to be regained is always worth a thousand-fold the pain and difficulty of the way.

Such, in few and general terms are the objections I find to the view of endless and hopeless punish-

ment for sin, apart from the gross and horrible way in which diseased fancy has represented it. The evidence from Scripture has been shown to be far from adequate to bear it out, while it shocks and confounds the best understanding we can gain of sin and the consequence of sin. It leads us to overlook the true nature and extent of the retribution God has appointed in our moral nature; it speaks to us falsely of human acts deserving the doom of an infinite penalty; and, finally, it prevents our seeing the true moral and disciplinary uses of pain, without which the infliction of the penalty would be horrible and wanton cruelty. And in all these ways it obscures the true and most solemn view of retribution, which God is impressing on us by every fact of the outward world, by every phase of our mental experience. *The future must answer for the present.* This is written in the very constitution of nature, and enters into the very structure of all life. *The present is to prepare us for the future.* This is equally and eternally and obviously true. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting."

DISCOURSE VIII.

SCRIPTURE INFALLIBILITY.

THE NEW TESTAMENT: NOT OF THE LETTER, BUT OF THE SPIRIT; FOR THE LETTER KILLETH, BUT THE SPIRIT GIVETH LIFE.— 2 Corinthians iii. 6.

In the discussion of all the preceding topics, I have endeavoured honestly to trace the sense of the Scriptures, and to show the insufficiency of their evidence, even by the most rigid rules of interpretation, to sustain the system of doctrines under review. I have preferred hitherto to meet our opponents on their own ground; to allow them all the benefit of a tribunal they claim to be infallible; and to leave in abeyance the discussion of those prior assumptions of authority and inspiration, which alone make it possible for any one to entertain, much less defend, the opinions we have been considering. And under this disadvantage I trust my leading proposition has been made good,— that the system of Orthodoxy, while open to all the objections first urged against it, does not make part of the legitimate sense of Scripture, and can be disproved by any intelligent believer in the Christian records. This is the conviction which must be left, I think, after fair inquiry, upon any candid mind.

I have now to go one step further, and show that the peculiar sort of authority claimed for the language of Scripture cannot be established; that the attempt to make the Bible consist of a series of infallible propositions, absolute and final as to all matters of belief, is vain and must always fail; that it cannot be assumed as a principle of reasoning without leading to results contradictory and absurd; that it fails of its end as a guide to any clear and consistent exposition of religious truth; that it affords a handle to every abuse of superstition and extravagance; that it is false to the purport and intention of the record, leads to casuistry, intolerance, and unbelief, while it destroys that liberality of mind and honest independence essential to the best results of human character and human thought. All these evils, I am deeply convinced, grow out from the commonly professed opinion as to the inspiration of the Scriptures; and in the course of my remarks I shall hope to make my propositions good. But first I must disembarrass myself of a few preliminary questions, lest the tenor of what I say should be perverted.

It was very natural that men, having discarded the authority of the Roman Church, and still cleaving with strong conviction to the main points of their religious creed, should desire some other authority to take the place of that. The refuge was easy and natural from the infallibility of the Church to the infallibility of the Book. With a mind habituated and practised to dependence, they seemed afloat and astray without an external support or guide. With few fundamental philosophic principles

of truth established,— without the point of support we find in natural science, whose principles, so far as they go, are incontestably and for ever fixed,— without the habit of freely exercising thought in logical or critical discussion,— they inevitably craved what would give them even the semblance of an ultimate authority. The tribunal to which they would appeal must be as large and absolute as that they renounced; and this they seemed to find in the record of God's revelations to his chosen race, covering a period of four thousand years.

Then, too, the Bible, first brought home to the people in their own tongue, had kindled their thought and nerved them with energy. Its declarations of the freedom of the religious life opened to them a whole new world of meaning in religion, opposed strongly to the barren traditions and ceremonies of the Church. Perhaps they had not entered into the profound symbolism of the doctrine and worship of the Middle Age, — whether from the fault of their own mind, or from the corruptions by which that symbolism was overgrown; but at any rate here was something which in its simplicity and strength came home to them. The teaching of the Bible to them was living, practical, glorious truth. And, besides, the Bible furnished them their weapons to fight against the Church. It was a desperate fight for them; for within living memory that Church had put out its hand to persecute, and strike down, and slay; its supremacy was almost uncontested, and hitherto it had succeeded in crushing each heresy as it rose. In that emergency, the

Bible, and the Bible only, was the defence of Protestants. Translated into the mother tongue, circulated everywhere among the people, and everywhere received with the same enthusiastic reverence, as a new charter of emancipation, it set on foot a movement that could sustain itself, kindled a fire that would not go out. We must take all these things into the account, if we would understand the veneration the Reformers cherished for that book, and the unqualified claim they were the first to make for its sufficient, literal, and absolute inspiration. I would not have it thought that I disparage or deny the importance of this implicit reverence for the Bible, mixed though it was with error. It furnished, perhaps, the only possible point of transition from the faith of tradition to that of reason and liberty. Through its means the historical life of Christendom remains one, and loses not its continuity. And in this regard its value cannot be overestimated. It saved the world from the threatening alternative between Romanism and Infidelity.

Again, I do not propose here to meet the fundamental question, as to the need and value of external authority to vouch for religious truth. Without doubt, as a mind is trained healthily and accustomed to reflect, it comes to feel less and less the *pressure* of such authority. Though its support may tacitly remain, yet it is less palpably felt. Still, some minds at all stages, and most minds at a certain stage, do undoubtedly feel the need of absolute and implicit reliance on the positive declarations of minds of a higher order; and, *a fortiori*, on what stands to

them as the express declaration of the God of truth. With this habit or disposition of the mind I have no intention to interfere. The question of authority, as a guide in forming religious opinion, I shall leave untouched; my only object being to show that it does not reside in the words and recorded forms of speech of the Bible, taken as a whole and without exception. If it can be shown to exist at all, it is in the authentic declarations of one suitably commissioned and vouched as a messenger of God; and the true point of inspiration will be his life, not the record of it,— his deeds and words, not the channel through which they are made known to us.

And, still further, in the critical discussion of the Scriptures I do not enter into the preliminary questions of the higher criticism: namely, the possibility of miracles and the nature of a revelation. Such questions demand far ampler consideration than could be given here, and would far too much complicate the purpose I have in view. It may save trouble to accept the one broad line of distinction between the Old and New Testaments,— not just now on critical grounds, but because we are only occupied with what belongs properly to Christians. It would be wrong to supersede or anticipate any historical or critical inquiry; so the simplest course is to confine myself expressly, in the statement I am making, to *the Christian Scriptures*. For my immediate purpose I must assume their genuineness — that they are rightly ascribed to their authors; their authenticity — that they are what they claim to be, the correct narrative of real events or addresses

made on real occasions; and their authority — that, when rightly understood, they give us knowledge of truth which ought to be known, and precepts which ought to be obeyed. The life and works of Christ are of course the central point of the history, and the sanction of the doctrine, whatever it be, contained.

Lastly, in the denial of that exclusive and infallible inspiration claimed for the books of Scripture, I would not be understood as limiting the modes by which God may reveal himself, or as denying the reality of that inspiration, in the broader sense, which is the sign of his presence in the soul. This is included in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, previously stated. How far it is real in any given case, and on what conditions it is bestowed, I do not care to argue. To state the doctrine scientifically is one thing, to feel it practically is quite another thing. In some sort and degree there is an inspiration accessible to all,— answering to the fact, which we all admit, of God's spiritual presence. It is taken for granted in every act of prayer. The aspiration of man is for the inspiration of God. To what degree this may have been carried in some of the sacred writers, we need not try to define exactly; but to me it seems not different in kind. Of course, it is quite a different thing from personal infallibility, which none of these writers ever claim. To a certain extent it may be a man's guide to truth; but by quickening and elevating his native powers, not by superseding them. At best he is, as Paul said, a "labourer together with God." The human element

is always mixed and interwoven with the Divine, in the texture of his thought. This general fact of inspiration, in proportion to a man's faith and earnestness, I by no means deny or overlook.

Having settled these previous points, let us see how much beyond them the Orthodox doctrine carries us. In its extreme form, it declares that every word in the Old and New Testaments is literally inspired and infallibly true; that the writers, men of various culture and at various times, were simply blind instruments, at most amanuenses, to write verbally from the dictation of the Holy Spirit, — as pipes for water, or trumpets for sound, to carry the Divine thought into the human mind; that nothing but the uncertainties of interpretation, and the slight diversity of ancient copies, stands between us and an exact transcript of the mind of God; that the books of Scripture, from first to last, are orderly and perfect parts of an harmonious, perfect whole; that there is no confusion, contradiction, or error,— or what seems so is due to our fallible mind, not to any imperfection there; and that the whole array of history, miracle, prophecy, genealogy, hymn, or doctrine is but an expansion, an illustration, or a confirmation of the one great "plan of salvation," which runs through it all, and is implied in its every word.

As to this extreme form of statement, I consider it rather as giving men's theory of what a revelation ought to be, than their account of what the Scripture revelation is. There is nothing in the Bible to give us the least hint of such a doctrine. It would be easy to show its absurdity from any page that

should be opened at random. Varieties of style, diversities of account, collision of precept, obscurity of expression, are each an insuperable objection to it. The evidence is so plain and easy which overthrows it, that one wonders how it could ever have got footing among men anywhere. What a glance at any chapter, almost at any verse, would practically overthrow, deserves no serious refutation. I cannot suppose for a moment that any one would undertake its serious defence.

The form of the doctrine with which we have to deal, very variously modified, is something like the following. It assumes three degrees or grades of inspiration, to one of which every passage in the Bible is to be referred. Either (1) the Holy Spirit exercised a certain supervision and restraint, guarding the writers from any possible mistake in narrating events which they knew traditionally or by other natural means, and prompting them to select those most important to be known; or (2) their minds were supernaturally raised and strengthened by the infusion of a Divine influence, so that they could discourse in a style of fancy or energy vastly beyond the natural power of any man, yet each according to the peculiarity of his own gifts and habit; or (3) truth was miraculously revealed to them,—knowledge of heavenly mysteries and future times,—which otherwise would have been for ever concealed from men.

Thus Inspiration becomes a threefold fact, exhibited in three different modes. These are technically called the inspiration of *Superintendence*, of *Eleva-*

tion, and of *Suggestion*. And I take the doctrine in this form, both because it is intelligible and consistent, and because (expressing "the latest and best views") it is supposed to be free from many of the difficulties that beset the former theory. It allows for differences in style; it relieves the doctrine from the charge of maintaining every detail of biography or genealogy to have been taught with equal weight and authority of Divine dictation with the most momentous truth; and it corresponds to the very evident gradation we find in the value of the contents of Scripture. Judging merely by the former theory, unqualified, we have no right to assume the solemn assurance of a future life and judgment to be of more moment to us than the number of slain on a Philistine battle-field, or the family register of the dukes of Edom. God having been pleased to reveal them all, it is our part to receive them with the same unquestioning reverence. To discriminate with our depraved reason among the Divine communications would be daring impiety. This intrinsic difficulty is in great part done away by the more careful and discriminating statement which I have given.

But in the main characteristic feature these two statements coincide. That is, they maintain that the Book not only *contains* the revelation, but that it *is* the revelation. The obvious apparent advantage of this doctrine is, that in the Bible we have a *direct* communication from heaven,—to all intents and purposes, as direct and trustworthy as that made to the prophets or apostles themselves. A book is put into

our hand, which we can trust implicitly, and take its statements as coming at first hand from God; having (in the words of Locke) "God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter." The sense of its authors is in all respects the absolute, unadulterated truth; its statements, of whatever sort, are authority beyond denial or dispute for points of history, science, theology, or morals. And, according to a favourite argument of some persons, the whole business of religious investigation is reduced to the task of simple interpretation. With grammar and dictionary, and competent knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew tongues, we have the only possible outfit, and all we want, for discovering every needful thing of truth or duty. Reason cannot prejudge, or science contradict, or experience and investigation overrule, any thing that is set down in the Scriptures, or by fair interpretation made out from them; and verbal or historical criticism is forestalled when it reaches a certain point, because all else must yield to the prior assumption, that there can be no error found in them. This is the doctrine which we have now to consider. And I propose to show, first, that it is assumed on insufficient evidence, and cannot be sustained; next, that it is not consistently held by its advocates, and does not answer its end as an infallible test of morals or doctrine; and, lastly, that it is hurtful to the religious character, and hostile to the interests of religious truth.

I. I shall not repeat what was urged before, of the intrinsic impossibility of establishing such an in-

fallible authority by any course of argument.* The difficulty of such a task must be very evident. A series of more than sixty books, comprising historical records, letters, proverbs, poems, addresses, prayers, in every style, and on all variety of topics, appearing at uncertain intervals through a period of a thousand years, and covering the history of nearly forty centuries, gathered in their present form by the unratified choice of men or the decision of unauthenticated tribunals, gives us no handle by which we can even begin to deal with the plain question of its inspired authority. It is hard to see how any one, aware of the history and uncertainty of our present canon, can venture to put all the books in a single category, or so much as approach the postulate of its inspiration with any hope of sustaining it. But let that pass. Taking the Scripture canon as it stands, waiving preliminary questions, and meeting the advocates of the theory on their own ground, what evidence can they rely on?

The testimony of Scripture itself ought not, in strictness of argument, to be received on this point; certainly not as covering the whole ground. Of course, no book can assert its own paramount authority, until its credibility in all respects has been established; because, to sustain this assertion, it must appeal (if disputed) to testimony. If it quotes itself, that is only saying the same thing in other words; this new assertion must be proved. If it quotes other testimony, it yields the paramount authority in the very act of defending it,— submitting it to be

* See page 32.

decided on by external proof, and so making that superior. This is the same fallacy as that committed by Roman Catholic writers, in endeavouring to vindicate by reasoning the authority of their Church as paramount over reason itself.

But, granting the entire trustworthiness of Scripture for all its deliberate assertions as to matters of doctrine, what claim does it make to the inspiration ascribed to it? Setting aside those passages referred to in the usual arguments on this subject, which simply speak of the special authority of Christ or his messengers to communicate instruction, those which refer to the belief of the Jews in their records, those which speak of the indwelling spirit of God in good men generally,—all which are points admitted on both sides,—together with some which only by the most arbitrary construction can be made to hint at any thing like this doctrine, I find but a single one on which a plausible argument can be sustained. It is the passage (2 Tim. iii. 16) rendered, "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration to God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Now the verb "is" is inserted both times by the translator, there being no verb at all in the Greek; and the word "and" is doubtful, so that we may leave it out, or translate it "also" if we choose, for it often has this meaning; and then our rendering may be, if we will, "All Scripture (*or* writing) divinely inspired is profitable (*or* is also profitable) for doctrine," &c. This is the commonly accepted rendering of critics;* and the statement,

* In the Revised Version, "Every scripture inspired of God *is* also profitable," &c.

thus interpreted, will be, that the Scripture was not only Timothy's guide and instructor in youth, but would be his most effectual help in his public teaching. Then the word "Scriptures" may refer either to the whole Jewish Scriptures (before alluded to), or to the inspired part of them, or to spiritual writings generally, which are desirable, whatever their source, as aids to a religious teacher in his work. It certainly does not refer to the writings of the Old and New Testaments as a whole, which is the only point that affects the present argument. And the word rendered "given by inspiration of God" (literally, "God-breathed") is so loose and vague in its meaning, that it may refer to any sort or degree of Divine influence exerted on men's minds,— to the inspiration of poetry, of eloquence, of enthusiasm, of piety, or any thing which is acknowledged as the direct action of God's indwelling spirit upon the human mind. And this word gives *the only direct argument* to sustain the Orthodox dogma of Plenary Inspiration.

So far, then, as it depends on the evidence of texts, the argument for the inspiration of the Scriptures appears to be wholly untenable. The circumstances sometimes appealed to as internal evidence to bear it out — such as the momentous nature of the truth contained, the spiritual depth or magnificence in style of many passages, the lofty strain of morality on the whole inculcated — are all such as we may and do most cheerfully admit; but they by no means affect the cogency of the argument. Admitting the trustworthiness of the books throughout,

there is still wanted their own explicit assertion, to hint at any peculiar inspiration of form and substance; and even this we find it impossible to make out. So that neither positively, nor by implication, can we make out any real claim for the doctrine in question; while the multitude of well-known inconsistencies, some trifling, others grave and important, are each enough for its complete and total overthrow.

II. To some it may appear as if the loss of this doctrine of verbal inspiration would make all religious truth doubtful,—as if a great support were taken away from the faith of men. So it may possibly be in a few cases; just as the proof that the earth turns round has no doubt unsettled the old habitual faith of many minds, and as the trust of many more in a special Providence is overwhelmed by what science tells of the infinite multitude of the stars and their stupendous magnitude. But, at worst, the loss in this regard is not so great as may at first appear. For, as I am now to illustrate, the Bible has not been the source of certainty and uniformity of belief, even among those who have held most strenuously to its infallibility. Indeed, with the history of the Protestant sects before us, almost all setting out with the same principle of the absolute authority of the Scriptures, and differing heaven-wide in their conclusions on every single point of dogmatic opinion, it might seem gratuitous to say any thing on this topic at all, or do more than point significantly at these diversities. My neighbour finds there the Trinity and Atonement, which I do not. One dis-

covers the doctrine of an eternal hell, another the equality and immunity of all men in the future life. And so on, through the whole catalogue. I cannot account for these diversities, but only state them. It is not going too far to say, that the language of the Bible, at least some part of it, can be interpreted to conform to any, the most extravagant, opinion that ever was or ever can be entertained.

Now all this would be comparatively harmless, unless for the previous opinion that *every thing must be true* which can be found in the Bible. It is this idea which gives such bigotry and pertinacity to those who advocate the opposite opinions; which makes them relentlessly hostile to those who deny their favourite point of faith. Difference of interpretation is to them treachery to the record. To overlook the point they insist on is defiance of God. The history of fanaticism and sectarian bigotry of all sorts is a practical demonstration of what might seem clear enough without it,—that, be the Bible as infallible as you will, it does not answer its end as a safe and unerring guide into one uniform, harmonious system of religious truth.

And this practical insufficiency of the Bible to meet the end proposed is further shown in the little reliance the advocates of Orthodoxy actually place upon it. *They do not trust the Bible to go alone.* Theoretically, their point of radical hostility to the Roman Church is that this Church does not put the Scripture into the people's hand without the priest's interpretation. But, in point of fact, they follow the same course, a little modified. Their religious in-

struction begins with a catechism, and is summed up in a creed. Each, of course, purports to be a selection and expansion of what is veritably in the Bible; but the only catechism and creed I ever heard of, in the very words of Scripture, were those in some Unitarian churches. And the only explicit Orthodox creeds I am acquainted with certainly make very little account indeed of Scripture words. The standard commentary makes a work near twelve times the size of the Bible itself. I do not say that these are knowingly and wilfully perversions of, or substitutes for, the doctrines found in the Bible; but certainly they are very curious illustrations of the maxim, so often quoted from Chillingworth, that "the Bible and the Bible only is the religion of Protestants." Instead of "the Bible," you have the artificial and compact statement of a creed; instead of "the Bible only," an enormous commentary expanded to many times its volume. Not that the Scriptures are not circulated too; this they are, assiduously, indefatigably, conscientiously. But, with the continual accompaniment of exposition, the painful and elaborate proof of doctrine, the forestalling of each person's judgment, so far as may be, by previously formed opinion, we see how little "the sufficiency of the Scriptures and the right of private judgment" are practically relied on, even by those whose creed should make it impious thus to step (as it were) between the inquiring mind and the Deity, who is making to it his solemn personal communication.

Thus the two tests which we have the clearest right to apply — uniformity of opinion and habitual

practical reliance on the written word — are found to fail utterly, when applied to men's profession of belief in Scripture inspiration. A third point is still more striking, though it is one which not only the advocates of this theory, but many others, would probably be reluctant to admit. It is that, not only in the adoption of theological opinion, but in their *practical views of duty*, they judge the Scriptures by their own reason, instead of submitting it to be judged by them. A difficult and constrained interpretation is put arbitrarily upon many passages, to square them with the received standard of right and wrong. Some parts, of an ascetic and severe morality, are explained away. Such doctrines as non-resistance, passive obedience to rulers, the wrongfulness of property, the superior merit of celibacy, and the community of goods,* are set aside, though quite as literally and expressly taught as any theological dogma, because it is assumed beforehand that to believe them is fanatical. And the unqualified declaration of the perfect moral system taught throughout the Scripture, and so getting an express Divine sanction from it practically, amounts to this: that the *good* parts of the moral doctrine of the Bible are regarded as inspired,— that is, what conscience and reason, our ultimate authority, pronounce to be good, — while the imperfect parts are kept back as far as possible, and studiously overlooked.

There is no such thing as honest men, of sound mind, submitting their honest sense of right and wrong to the requirements of a book. It would be

*Matt. v. 39; 1 Pet. ii. 13; Matt. vi. 19; 1 Cor. vii. 7, 8; x. 24.

a great calamity if it were so; but it is a calamity that can never happen to any large extent. No doubt men's reverence for Scripture falls in with and enhances their reverence for the right,— nay, even evokes that slumbering reverence sometimes, and makes them conscientious men. But when the two exist together and come in collision, as they often do, it is the Scripture that always yields. It is pliable as wax in the hands either of earnest conviction or of obstinate prejudice. Thus, if there is any one thing expressly forbidden in terms by the higher morality of Scripture, it certainly seems to be the act of fighting. Yet when the occasion came, the written law has always yielded before the dictate of common sense, or the supposed necessity of the case. Every church has consecrated the banner of fighting men, and sent chaplains to the battle-field. And the solitary exceptions to this in appearance are not so in fact. They are cases where the personal conviction, secret or avowed, has tallied with the sense of Scripture, and has brought men to renounce the profession of arms, and undergo pain, ridicule, or death, rather than raise a hand in self-defence. I do not say the Bible has not done much — possibly, more than all other books put together — *to educate the general sense of right and wrong*. But I do say that, where that sense has come in collision with the letter of its precepts, even among those most sincere and earnest in professing to believe its Divine authority in every word, it has been the Bible that was compelled to yield. Where it has dictated to blind, unreasoning obedience, there has resulted untold extravagance and harm.

III. It seems to be clearly established, from what has gone before, both that there is no evidence to sustain the complete and infallible inspiration of the Scriptures, and that, even if there were, they do not serve the purpose of a uniform and trustworthy guide, whether to belief or duty. But, if these were all, I should not feel called on to express so emphatically my dissent from it. If the doctrine were simply harmless, it might be better to let it alone, nor disturb its easy resting-place in so many minds. But no opinion can be harmless, which misstates and overlays the true foundation of our faith. There are evils and dangers associated with this opinion, always more or less apparent, and sometimes pressing. To these I briefly alluded in the beginning of my remarks; and would now illustrate them more fully,— showing, in other words, that "it is hurtful to the religious character, and hostile to the interests of religious truth."

The first obvious mischief in the claim of any writing to strict infallibility is, that it cramps the action of the mind, discourages free criticism and inquiry, by which alone truth can be independently established, and so generates a narrow and jealous dogmatism. Especially is this the case with writings like these, so diversified in intention, so various in style, representing ideas so wholly different as they must be, if only from their variety of age. This objection, it is evident, does not apply to the circumstance of having some one point or order of truths declared authoritatively, and put beyond the reach of question or denial. Such truths are the

Being and Providence of God, the Immortality of the soul, the reality of Judgment,—truths which some accept on the express word of an inspired messenger, others as being essentially involved in the constitution of our soul. Principles of belief such as these, primordial truths, simple and grand, do not of course stand in the way of the mind's progress, or any amount of spiritual liberty, and may even be held essential to any high degree of either. But the miscellaneous declarations of a multitude of books, like those included in our Bible, cannot be taken, as a whole, as ultimate and indisputable facts, without the harm to which I have alluded. Men's minds will differ; and this difference will give occasion for endless reproach and bigotry. It would seem invidious to press the illustrations of this, which must spontaneously occur to every one.

A still greater danger results when the mind begins to investigate, and comes, as it inevitably must, in collision with statements in these books. The old battle between science and revelation is renewed at every step, and is not over yet. Three or four centuries ago, men seriously argued that the earth could not be spherical, because the Bible spoke of its ends and corners. The wide-spread belief in the Jewish or Chaldee mythology of evil spirits is another example of a kindred sort. To some minds, the poetic hyperbole quoted from the unknown book of Jasher, —that, at the command of Joshua, the Hebrew chieftain, the sun and moon stood still in the vale of Ajalon,—outweighs the plainest evidence of astronomy as to the monstrous incredibility of such a state-

ment; and the war between the geologists and the interpreters of Genesis has within a few years broken out afresh. The collision is most unfortunate; but we see plainly enough which side must be the sufferer. Natural science marches steadily on, regardless of the protest of commentators; and the positions it occupies, one by one, are hopelessly impregnable. There is nothing for this to fear now, as in the days of Galileo; the peril is all the other way. And that is a real peril. The old protest of the dogmatist, "If one part is given up, how do you know that any of it is true?" now comes back upon them with terrible force. Very many parts are proved to be untenable, even by the showing of the book itself. They must be given up. The dogma that would maintain them once, being too weak for this, may yet have strength enough left to bring a doubt over the spiritual truth itself in many minds. I have heard of a sailor in a shipwreck, who lashed himself to the anchor, and was drowned. So with this dogma, which has possibly been the anchor of some men's faith, but is its destruction now. If the question comes, Do you stake your religious hope on the authenticity of such a book, or the infallibility of such a statement? — it must be answered one way or another. Orthodoxy or natural science, one or the other, must break down. Science can stand alone now; and as to pure and spiritual Christianity, there is no fear for that. The only danger is from that system which has studiously wrapped up men's holiest hopes with dogmas that cannot be sustained. These dogmas

are sure to perish in their own time. Take Orthodoxy at its word, and the faith and hope of humanity should be wrecked and perish with them!

I have no fear that the Christian faith will perish so easily as that; but in the very steps by which it would assert itself, it gives another evidence of the mischief suffered from that doctrine. To keep the unalterable words of Scripture, they must be harmonized with the changing belief; hence casuistry and subterfuge without end. A spiritual sense must be forced, to supersede the plain meaning of the words. Verbal subtilties, remote analogies, which the writers never dreamed of, must be devised, not to evolve the Bible sense, but to square it at any hazard with the sense of men. This sometimes degenerates into positive and pitiful dishonesty, playing fast and loose with the clear meaning of the books, as a dishonest counsel forces the letter of the law, to overbear the clear proof of his client's guilt. Enormous erudition is brought in, to bear out and justify some petty point of Biblical interpretation; and what was assumed as the unyielding mould to shape the material of men's belief becomes passive and inert, to take what shape and hue they will. And this casuistry of verbal criticism seems to be inseparable from the pertinacious adherence to forms of language, while allowing the smallest measure of free speculation or investigation to the mind. As was before shown of moral precepts, so here of intellectual opinion, the profession of deference to the written word is contradicted at every step of its practical application. That the freest

and boldest thinking should at times come round and coincide remarkably in earnest and religious minds with Bible passages, whose meaning was obscure till this side-light was thrown on it from personal experience, is a noble testimony to the good faith and spiritual depth of a large part of these remarkable writings. The Hebrew Psalms and the Epistles of Paul answer back to the earnest thought of the simplest and the wisest. But this spontaneous and living testimony, while prevented on the one hand by a scornful spirit, that cavils at the Bible, is equally prevented on the other by the strict and literal adhesion to the form, which suppresses the free development of the mind that might come round to that coincidence. At least, its value as testimony is mainly gone. It must be free, or it will be worthless. What we would accept is "the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."

And finally, not only have fanaticism and evil passion of every sort found their pretext and colouring in portions of these ancient books; not only has the whole history of intolerance, in its pitiful superstitions and bitter persecutions, shown the harm of taking the word instead of the spirit to judge opinion by; not only have fierce controversies been waged on minute points of opinion, and the merciless abuses of religion under the rule of bigots found a justification in the Jewish history,— as the Puritans slaughtered their foes by example of Samuel, who hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord, and as persecutors have always found the precedent they

wanted in the dealings between the prophets and the idolaters; but a worse evil remains behind, at least one more perilous at the present day. The imperfect morality of an uncivilized age is allowed to dictate to the conscience educated under all the influences of Christianity. Special pleadings for special wrongs are founded on the unauthorized application of precepts, and the gratuitous assumption of moral infallibility. It is held that the practice of three thousand years ago gives a standard which one is excused for not endeavouring to surpass at the present day. The ritual observance of the Jewish Sabbath (for infringing which the stern camp discipline of Moses stoned a man to death) is made the rule for keeping the Christian festival of Sunday. All foundation of right is point-blank denied, except the edict given for the Hebrew national law. Arbitrary and capricious selection is inevitably made among the precepts, while the right principle of selection is disregarded. And the social evils which to the Christian mind stand as signs of a rude and barbarous, or at least imperfect, state,—slavery, war, polygamy, extreme inevitable poverty, and needless cruelties in the administration of justice,—are seriously defended from Jewish precedents, and maintained to be not only inseparable from the condition of human society, but sanctioned and consecrated by the express command of God!

All other evils seem light in comparison with this, falsifying as it does the basis of morality, and deadening the conscience, which should be a constant and living force, to be the bondman of a creed.

This is against its nature, which is to overcome all wrong, and carry on the work of righteousness in the soul and in the world. For this there must be intellectual and moral liberty. Things should be judged by their own merits, or exculpated by the necessities of the given case; never defended or accused by the letter of some obsolete sanction or penal law, applying only to a remote and barbarous age. The judgment which Jesus passed, in denouncing one by one several of the express provisions of the Old Testament, is no more than what every honest man must do, on peril of sacrificing his sincerity and tampering with his faith. And this is precisely what the doctrine of Scripture infallibility renders impossible. It cannot stand, accordingly, with the highest and best type of practical Christianity.

I have been forced to pass so rapidly over this statement of the harm wrought by this false doctrine, as I consider it, that I almost fear my real position may be misunderstood. Let me say, then, in conclusion, that it is only the false view of Scripture authority I contend against, not the true use and value of the sacred books. On the forced and groundless claim of literal infallibility, they are open to all the objections I have urged. But, whether we take them on their loftiest claim, as the record, in the main authentic, of God's revelation to mankind; whether we consider their central point of dignity, in the life of Jesus himself, and his apostles' exposition of his truth; or whether we think only of their intrinsic interest as the religious autobiography of the human race,— the deposit of the history, the con-

flicts, the doubts, the prayers, and profoundest spiritual experience of the most earnest men; as the suggester of duty, the quickener of conscience, the assurance of immortal faith to so many,—in whatever way we view these writings, we cannot overlook, we cannot overstate, their worth to us. Misstate it we may, by insisting on the dogmatic assumption of their infallibility; and how deep the wrong thus inflicted on them, I have feebly endeavoured to show. My language has not been stronger than that of Paul, who says, "*The letter killeth*, while the spirit giveth life"; or than that of Jesus, who says, "Ye have made the commandment of God of none effect through your tradition." Nor does any injury to the word of Scripture seem to me so deep as that injury to the sense and spirit, which I have endeavoured to illustrate in my examination of that whole scheme of theology, founded on a perversion of both words and spirit.

DISCOURSE IX.

HISTORY AND POSITION OF ORTHODOXY.

IT WAS NEEDFUL FOR ME TO WRITE UNTO YOU, AND EXHORT YOU THAT YE SHOULD EARNESTLY CONTEND FOR THE FAITH WHICH WAS ONCE DELIVERED UNTO THE SAINTS.—Jude 3.

Two portions of the plan I had in view are now completed. Throughout the course of argument presented, I have endeavoured to do strict and even justice to the opinions under examination. Taking the term Orthodoxy as signifying the prevalent system of modern Protestant theology, I have tried to characterize fairly its main features, to select the strong points rather than the weak ones, to take the most plausible statement which seems truly to represent the doctrine, and to waive the advantage of making the system as such responsible for the inconsistencies and extravagance of its advocates. Whatever incongruity has been shown to exist in it is essential to the nature of the scheme itself. It is the course of thought as a whole that I have directed your attention to, and not the unskilful statement of its several parts. The essential idea, not its accidental developments, and perhaps perversions, has made the ground of every thing I have said. The great merit of the system, let me repeat once more, is the merit of consistency. Its strength is as a

work of logic. The fundamental principle involved in it may be true or false,—my aim has been to prove it false; but, whatever it is, the whole is honestly deduced from it, and the whole must be judged according to it. In this view, and in this only, I have considered the several points as they successively came up. And the result of our inquiry seems to be, that the evidence for that system of religious belief depending on this principle is insufficient; while its character is such that, except on the most irresistible and overwhelming proof, we shall be forced to reject it.

In the review which has been presented, I have spoken generally in my own name only, and have said nothing as the representative of a sect. No others need be held responsible for statements to which they might only assent in part. So far as was possible, I have sought to present a perfectly fair and perfectly independent examination of principles, not caring to gain assent to every statement, so much as wishing to set men thinking for themselves. For the present, this seems to be the best office of theological discussion. Let men think for themselves, sincerely and in earnest, and that integrity of the human faculty, which is the Divine law in the realm of thought, will bring about a better result than we can dictate or foresee.

I come now to the third and final division of my course. Having hitherto been engaged in the discussion of fundamental principles, and their development in the series of doctrines making up the Orthodox system, I am now to show how it was that

that system came to be received, and oppose to it, more distinctly than has yet been done, the principles which have been all along implied. The history of Orthodox opinion, and an exhibition of the main features of Liberal Christianity, will form the topics of two concluding lectures. Not that I can pretend to give a full and satisfactory account of either. Whole lives of historical investigation, and the treasures of amazing erudition, have been spent in the still unfinished work of the first; and the elements about us are far too incoherent and shapeless to let us state the last with any fulness. Still, to make a few points prominent may serve our purpose, by enabling us to see our object more distinctly and from a better point of view.

The objection in principle and defect of proof as regards the doctrines we have been considering have been long and painfully felt by many, who at the same time were withheld by a secret dread from disowning the faith as they were taught it. Some, as is well known, have returned to the bosom of the Roman Church, to find that assurance which on Protestant principles they must have lost. Some have rejected the doctrines themselves, and remained floating between a cold negative belief and the obscure rudiments of a more liberal faith,—unless the confirmed habit of skepticism should keep them from having any faith at all. And, among those who adhere strictly to the system generally professed, it is not too much to say that the strongest argument with them is the *prestige* of a supposed antiquity. They receive it, because to them it rep-

resents the faith of past generations; because it is associated with the love and hope and trust of many who have lived and died professing it; and because it is taken for granted to be the doctrine of the primitive Church of Christ. In maintaining this, they suppose themselves to be "contending for the faith once delivered to the saints." And it is the dim apprehension of cutting themselves off from the Christian communion of the early time, and embarking at hazard in new heresies, alien to the early faith, that more than anything else puts a check on the spontaneous movement of their own independent thought. This is the prejudice which, so far as I may, I wish to remove, in the course of what I have now to say.

Each Christian church considers itself to have the original and essential Christian faith. To admit it to be otherwise would be, not only to plead guilty to the charge of heresy, but to discredit any particular propriety in its claim to the name of Christian. From Catholic to Quaker, each assumes itself to be the true Church, in all essentials, after the model of the first; from high Trinitarian to Rationalist or Socinian, each ascribes to Jesus precisely the measure of dignity which, in his reading of the Gospel, he understands him to claim, and which therefore rightfully belongs to him. Each receives in his own way the account of that greatest historical event,— the introduction of Christianity to the world,— and therefore each has, or thinks he has, the word of Scripture on his side. No one party has a right to charge another with doing wilful dishonour to the Script-

ures; no one can make exclusive claim of reverence and fidelity to Christ. My whole course of argument has gone to show how fully (as in all sincerity we think) the Christian records bear out our exposition of the faith. I need not press this matter further. Each, of course, assumes that the Testament, rightly interpreted, is on his side.

I have represented the Orthodox system hitherto as a complete and consummate whole,— as a consistent thing throughout, with its parts mutually dependent, and logically bound together. So it is, as wrought out gradually, and defended by the succession of able thinkers who, since the Reformation especially, have laboured in its behalf. But so it was not at first. Its symmetry and completeness did not come all at once. It is an artificial and complicated structure, forced into harmony with the Christian records, rather than naturally deduced from them. Though to the common eye it bears the mark of high antiquity, yet in a wider, historical view, it is only one of the transient forms in which men have clothed the one indestructible element of religious truth. To account for its existence, though imperfectly, seems a necessary part of the task of its fair examination. I propose, therefore, to consider briefly the process by which it was developed, and its position now. My remarks will relate, first, to the previously existing materials, or elements, out of which the system was constructed, together with the changes made from time to time in its essential character; and, finally, to those circumstances in its actual position which indicate that it will be soon superseded and outgrown.

I. I am very far from pretending to have enough of profound and accurate learning, even if this were the right time and place, to trace the rudiments of the doctrinal scheme in question among the various religions and philosophical schools of antiquity. In the discussion of the Trinity and the Atonement, I briefly alluded to some of these sources, showing how the essential character of those doctrines has varied from time to time,— their mode of interpretation and their place in the system being modified by the turn of thought in successive centuries.* And as to the essential idea implied throughout the whole, which is, *that a sacrifice or equivalent is required to satisfy Divine justice, and enable man to escape the doom of infinite and hopeless misery*, I have not hesitated to call it both heathen in its origin and unchristian in its spirit. It is rather a matter of curious erudition than of practical utility, to trace out the remote sources of the stream. I trust enough has been said to show that the Scriptures are not that source; and, further than this, a very few words will suffice to the end I have in view. This is, to illustrate how the fundamental ideas in old religions, pagan and Jewish, entered into the way of thinking among the early Christians, and affected the tone of their theology. Christianity itself I shall assume to be the simple, pure, religious faith taught by Christ; implied in all his teachings, and in the belief of all religious men; received whether on his express authority, or from sympathy with his spirit. For the present I shall content my-

* See pages 60 and 101.

self with this definition of it, my object being to show how foreign elements were superinduced upon that faith, till its primitive character was to a great degree obscured and changed.

It would be a great mistake to suppose that there ever was a time of doctrinal unanimity among the disciples of Christ. The pleasant hypothesis of a primitive undivided church vanishes as soon as we come in sight of the period when it is supposed to have existed. That, at a particular point of time, "the multitude were of one heart and one mind," is a proof that one common sentiment bound them very close together, and impelled them to one earnest work; but by no means shows that they were agreed even on any single recognized principle of belief and action, consciously accepted and deliberately professed. Not theory but practice, not talk so much as work, made their proper province. The apostles themselves seem hardly to have had a glimpse of the spiritual design of Jesus till after his final departure; and the first church action that was taken, the appointing of deacons, was in consequence of division and complaint.

A few years after came the great controversy on circumcision, or the ritual, to settle the point whether the Christian Church was to be a Jewish sect or an independent body. The apostles laid down no rules infallibly, but debated, and reasoned, and differed, and acted independently, like other men. Paul "withstood Peter to the face, because he was to be blamed." The church at Corinth seems to have been split in four parties, that of Paul, Apollos,

Cephas, and Christ. Two thirds of the later Testament writings are made up of controversial discussion. James warns against overstatements of the spiritual party; Peter thinks that Paul has written "some things hard to be understood"; and Jude exhorts the brethren to "*contend earnestly* for the faith once delivered to the saints." Now, all these things prove conclusively that there never was a period of doctrinal unity and harmony among Christians. Such a primitive state is purely imaginary,— men's fond dream of what ought to be, not their sober knowledge of what is or ever was. And yet Christianity was a real and a vital thing,— of power to make all these different men live and act and hope and suffer and pray together, and call themselves by one common name. If it was not a doctrinal system, received alike by all, what was it? It could have been only what I said before,— the simple, pure, religious faith, which men took at the word and life of Christ. A dogmatic system of opinion it certainly was not. And the only common element we can detect among the various minds of the first disciples is the simple spiritual truth, the religion of reverence, trust, and love, which we call pure Christianity, as distinct from that of sects and creeds. This is found in every sect, presupposed in every creed. It is the primitive, essential, permanent, indestructible element, through all diversities of belief,—"the faith once delivered to the saints."

The principles or universal truths which Jesus taught—the love and providence of God, the sacredness of human life, the standard of perfect purity,

the retribution of the world to come — cannot by any possibility be reduced to a dogmatic system, claiming to be infallible and complete, without violating their essential character, and transcending the plain meaning of his words. Still, it is one of the necessities of the human mind to put its opinions in systematic form,— its religious opinions full as much as any; and these will be earnestly adhered to, and vehemently defended, just in proportion as the faith they are connected with is held sacred and dear. We are not to wonder at the controversies of the early Church; only to lament their extreme violence, and find out, if we may, the origin of opinions so radically various, so bitterly conflicting. In the stating of his belief, no one can tell how much is due to previous education and habits of thought, or how much is legitimately derived from any single principle. The early Christians were never able to analyze their own opinions accurately, and say just what was peculiarly Christian in them, and what was not. Latent beliefs and hopes, that had been kindled long before and smothered under superstition or abuse, would be revived; all the better faculties of their nature, discouraged under the world's idolatry, or rebuked by its skeptic speculation, would be energized afresh. The Christian found himself a new man, sharing a new life of trust and love and hope. The fact of its being so he was well assured of; the reason and essential character of it was not so easy a thing to tell.

The early writers and teachers of the Church had been philosophers of some Greek or Eastern school,

or Jews, bred in reverence to the law of Moses. Some adhered to the ritual declaration, that "without shedding of blood there is no remission," applying it to every form and degree of sin; others laboured to force a spiritual meaning upon every word of the Old Testament; while others, again, rejected the whole Jewish dispensation, as the work of an inferior and even malignant divinity, and thought the enemies of Jehovah were the friends of the true and perfect God. Some had the Oriental notion of a radical hostility between matter and spirit; and they held that Christ did not come at all in the flesh, or suffer in reality, but that a phantom or imaginary shape was fastened to the cross. This belief, it is said, prevails widely in Asia at the present day. Some had the Platonic or Pythagorean notion of the mystic properties of numbers, and the creative power of the Divine Idea or Word; and Christian doctrine was speedily affected by their terminology. It was a wavering and uncertain line, at best, that separated the true Church from the heretical. The statement, that strict justice and love cannot subsist in the same being, was (we are told) first made by Marcion, who applied it to his doctrine of law and grace; and he was bitterly denounced by the good Polycarp as "the first-born of Satan."

Then there existed a thousand forms of speculation, as wild and vague as any now. The old polytheism was breaking down under the attack of philosophical skepticism; while spiritual or transcendental theories sprang up in Egypt and the East, to

satisfy men's craving for religious truth, and the wildest superstitions of magic, the craziest fanaticism, and blindest reverence towards miracle-mongers, spread over a large part of the Roman Empire. Apollonius of Tyana and Alexander of Abonoteichos were not far from contemporary with Christ. To fill the void left by the decay of ancient beliefs, there rushed in a mingled flood of every species of fanatic extravagance. From the cruel rites of magic to the lofty speculations of a proud Gnostic philosophy, every thing that appealed in any way to men's religious sense found a welcome somewhere. Such (says Constant) was the condition of the human race. Skepticism boasted of delivering men from prejudice and error and fear; and all errors and fears seemed let loose. Reason was proclaimed; and the whole world was struck with madness. All systems were founded in calculation and addressed to interest, permitting pleasure and recommending repose; and never were more shameful delusions, more unruly disturbances, more bitter pain: till the wretched race seemed desirous to perish, that it might escape from *a world without a God.**

And, while the spiritual hunger and emptiness of such an era formed part of the preparation in men's minds for the appearing of a pure, positive faith, like that of Christ, it cannot be disguised that habits of thought so strange and various made it utterly impossible to give a sound and simple exposition of that faith. It could not but be that controversies

* Roman Polytheism. Compare "Christian History in its Three Great Periods," vol. i., chaps. 3, 4.

should exist as to every possible dogmatic statement that should be framed. And controversies accordingly there were.

It was from the midst of that chaos of religious opinion, of which I have endeavoured to give some hint, that the positive doctrines of Christianity had to be developed, one by one. That this was no simple and easy matter, the incessant controversial labours of Paul are a sufficient evidence. Still more striking is the history of the establishment of the doctrine of Christ's Divinity, two centuries and a half later. Of that great battle I cannot pretend to give even the briefest account. By the acknowledgment of candid historians, like Neander, no distinct doctrinal statements were insisted on in the earlier period of the Church, a simple general declaration of faith in Christ being held sufficient. But, when the period of the persecution was over, and a nominally Christian emperor ruled the Roman world, the smothered struggle broke out in great bitterness. Arius and Athanasius were the heads of the two contending parties. The feud was long and bitter, lasting not less than half a century. First one side, and then the other, laid down the form of faith for the Christian world. Five times Athanasius was in exile, and for a large part of forty years in peril of death. He triumphed at last, as we know, and gave the tone to the general opinion of the Western Church; while the Northern converted tribes continued for many centuries, as do some of the Oriental churches to this day, to hold opinions radically different on what is held to be the most vital point of all.

The fact remains historically true and incontrovertible, that the cardinal doctrines of Orthodoxy were slowly matured, one by one, established by uncertain and fluctuating majorities, in councils notorious for violence of party feeling, and maintained for a long time by the terror of the sword. I have illustrated this in only a single instance,— the doctrine of the Deity of Christ. The Trinity, as I before mentioned, did not appear in its final shape till later, at least, than the middle of the fifth century. The several successive forms assumed by the doctrine of the Atonement I have also exhibited before. Not less violent was the controversy on other points. In 385, Priscillian was put to death in Spain for heresy on the subject of moral evil; "the first instance of the judicial execution of a heretic," says Gieseler, "and universally condemned." And the more attentively we consider the history of religious opinion, the more clearly shall we see, both that the fundamental character of the prevailing theology has very widely varied from age to age, and that the form given to it at successive periods has had no weight of authority whatever that should overrule the distinct and deliberate conviction of any well-informed and candid man.

One further point deserves a moment's notice,— the sort of spiritual authority by which the received opinion for the time being has been enforced. That no ecclesiastical power was vested in an organized body of men by any commission of Jesus, at least to endure for more than a single generation, seems as plain an inference as it is possible to draw from the

general language of the Testament. That it was not uniformly submitted to, at any rate, is proved by the divisions in the apostolic council, by Paul's opposition to Peter, before spoken of, and by his steady refusal to regard the apostles in any other light than as independent teachers of a common faith. But ecclesiastical power being once got, it was never difficult to find occasion for putting it forth. How heresies were dealt with by the Roman Church, some centuries ago, we know from the history of the Inquisition, the Albigenses, the Knights Templars, the Council of Constance, and the wars of the Huguenots in France. If Protestant sects have had less power, they have often had no more scruple about using what power they had. From the precise and rigid dogmatism of Calvin, carried out to the burning of Servetus for heresy by the authorities of Geneva, down to the shadowy remnant of ecclesiastical sway shown in excluding fellow-believers from the communion-table for some trifling variation in their creed, the still existing forms of discipline and excommunication, or simply withholding the Christian name when claimed by others as a privilege or a right,—we still find relics and traces of the same domineering spirit, the same disposition to lord it over God's heritage and have dominion over others' faith, so nobly disclaimed by the Apostle Paul.

The remnants of this exclusive and domineering temper, still existing in our churches, I have not thought it best to notice more at length, desiring only to show how baseless is the assumption they

are founded on, and how hostile to the mind of Christ is the theory they are called in to support. Positive cruelty and harsh injustice are often committed, even now, in the wielding of that frail and shadowy sceptre of spiritual authority. But the sufferers by this now are individuals, not whole classes, tribes, or nations, as in former times. Except in isolated cases, the pressure of church authority is not often very harshly felt, perhaps; and the spirit of our time is most powerfully arrayed against it. But, as part of the machinery which has always been found necessary to brace these doctrines up against the assaults of reason and independent thought, we cannot but notice it thus passingly. It forms a very important, and indeed essential, feature generally in the history of Orthodox opinion. Why the authority has been exercised that way, it is perhaps not difficult to tell. But, as its terrors disappear, we may at least rejoice that matters of opinion are likely to be judged more independently, and more truly by their merits.

II. I have thus brought forward the points best worth noting in the historical aspect of the theory in review: namely, the previously existing elements which were blended with the primitive Christian faith; next, the process by which, in the course of centuries, the several doctrines were brought to their present shape; and finally the authority, or ecclesiastical power, which has always been brought in play to defend them against the invasions of free inquiry. The remaining point for consideration is the condition in which we find these doctrines now,

— the hold they have on the general mind at the present day, and the counter influences that are at work to weaken that hold.

It is only with great distrust, and many qualifications, that we can speak of the actual position which any form of belief occupies at any given time. Long after the Greek mythology had lost credit with thinking men, and the inhabitants of cities generally, it lingered in the rural provinces; and hence the name Pagan, which in its first use meant simply "villager." At Athens, Paul found an altar "to the unknown God," and only Epicureans and Stoics to encounter; while in a remote district of Asia Minor the people were ready to offer sacrifice to him as the god Mercury. Now it would be a gratuitous affront to rank any form of Christian belief with the relics of that old mythology; but the law of the mind observed in both cases is the same. Every doctrine, considered as the imperfect statement of a spiritual fact, must pass through three stages: being, first, the sincere and genuine expression of some point of personal conviction or experience, the growth directly of the active religious sentiment; next, taught or transmitted in the form so given to it, without a doubt as to its truth, only less earnestly felt because taken at second hand; and finally, retained as a dead and empty form after the spirit is departed, or the religious fact is no longer perceived in it, when it must be speedily supplanted by some other belief, or disbelief. These three are blended and intermingled, so that they can never be accurately distinguished and positively pronounced upon; yet

they indicate the process of mind which always ensues as to any practical and imperfect statement of religious truth. The truth to be expressed is in its nature infinite; and the form of words is never broad enough to cover it completely.

It would not become me to pronounce with any positiveness as to the degree of earnestness and sincerity with which the doctrines in question are adhered to. Certain it is, that their signification is very essentially modified from what it once was. No intelligent man would be willing, at the present day, to commit himself to the forms of statement which were once rigidly held to: for instance, as to Election, Predestination, and Natural Depravity. Language is often used with a secret reservation and qualification,—more to have a certain effect within the Church, than to state dogmatically the spiritual condition of those outside the Church. Denunciation of heretical opinion may be made as positively as ever; but, in the thousand social and Christian courtesies that are daily passing, the "middle walls of partition" between the various sects are imperceptibly undermined. More and more is necessarily made of the great spiritual principles that underlie the religious character, less and less of the form in which they may be professed. Whatever may be the declarations of men's creed, I never can believe that, when the case occurs, the previously formed opinion does not melt down before the exhibition of pure, practical Christianity, anywhere. In earnest, positive statements of the conditions of the religious life, men fall back more and more on what is

simple and universal; and their notion of what Christianity is corresponds more nearly with their ideal of a devout and holy life. And this process, continually going on, and usurping by degrees the place of the dogmatism that was once so much dwelt on, is an almost certain pledge that, whatever opinions be personally held and cherished, the essentials of the Christian life will be regarded more and more as the simple first principles of piety and love. Dogmatic Christianity must be superseded by the practical, or the danger is that both will decay together.

Another thing that should be noticed is, that critical investigation and discussion are doing very much to weaken the hold on multitudes of opinions formerly held without doubt or scruple. The sublimation of Orthodoxy into metaphysics, and the bold speculation that has taken the place of implicit trust in the Scriptures, are well-known features of the theology of the present day. Both are unavoidable incidents in the career of the active mind. Besides, the proof relied on to sustain these doctrines is of a sort which has very much lost credit in modern times. Textual interpretation and ecclesiastical authority, practical and cogent arguments once, pass for little now to the independent seeker after truth. Natural science and historical criticism have introduced a whole new order of investigation; and what would once be received with easy and credulous assent has now to abide a far severer scrutiny.

The inevitable consequence of this is, that what does not harmonize with the analogies of nature and

the received dictates of other branches of knowledge maintains at best a hazardous and uncertain place in the world's esteem. Either it claims a province of its own (which may be conceded to it by courtesy), and aspires to nothing more than to rule the way of thinking of the credulous few; or else, maintaining its relation to the great world of human thought and progress, it is forced to make concessions to men's common sense, to keep in reserve its more prominent and characteristic features, and to appear simply as the champion of religious faith and good morals. It waives its distinctive character as Orthodoxy; it forgets the ancient lofty claim of theology as queen of the sciences; it occupies precisely the same ground, to all practical purposes, with that very style of heresy which from a dogmatic point of view it persists in denouncing. The position of practical religion and morality is one and the same everywhere. And the virtual disavowal of an exclusive sanctity and authority, and the habit which more and more prevails of pleading in behalf of religion generally, rather than any special form of it, are worth noting, as one sign of the position occupied by Orthodoxy proper at the present day.

Still more striking is the illustration of this point which we find in the case of earnest and thoughtful men, of every religious body. They come more and more to occupy a common ground. The effort of the "new orthodoxy," or "liberal orthodoxy," to spiritualize the ancient dogma brings its meaning round to coincide with that of the modern speculation. After all, men's understanding of the dogma

is only the requirement of one or another school of metaphysics. The creed may remain the same; but read in the light of old English philosophy it is one thing, in that of new German philosophy it is quite another thing. Substitute this style of thinking for the old Calvinistic metaphysics, and we care not much how tenaciously you retain the forms of speech. The essential value of any doctrine, after all, will be as a true and profound exposition of human experience; and just in proportion to men's sincerity and depth will this be found to be substantially the same, from whatever school of theology it may proceed. The broad features of the religious life, underlying every form of speculation or dogma, are the same in all; and as our interpretation of these is rich and full, shall we attain completeness in our theology. And this is a way of viewing the subject which is inevitably coming to take the place of the old style of dogmatizing. Let it once be clearly apprehended and consistently followed out, and we shall no longer be troubled with the vexing and relentless warfare of contending sects and creeds, no longer distressed with dogmatic declarations of God's wrath upon heretics and unbelievers.

And, once more, zeal for the doctrine of an exclusive church is coming to be superseded by a newborn zeal for other things. Points of public practical morality, positive and plain matters of humanity and reform, have more weight than church authority with the mass of conscientious men. From its peculiar position in the world of thought, Orthodoxy has been compelled to spend an undue portion of its

energies in the work of self-defence. Hence, danger of hesitation about applying principles of Christian righteousness to existing facts; and then, of mutilating the principles themselves. Religious bodies have always been charged with timidity and backwardness as to great points of public morals. If they can answer the charge by saying their office is to develop individual conscience and moral force, it is a good and sufficient answer. But this cannot be the case, while the province of religion is placed chiefly in what priesthoods have always claimed control of, namely, *religious emotion or ceremony*, and *the future life*. *Religious principle* and *the present life* are legitimate portions of that field. And so loud is the demand for the application of religion here, that a church refusing to hear that call must lose ground relatively, in the advance of a moving age. Theological opinion is remote and ineffectual, just so far as it ceases to be a sincere exposition of the facts of life, and throws itself back on the realm of obsolete ideas. It cannot bear up against the pressure of the world's advance. If it resists, that pressure will be inevitably and most severely felt.

It might seem, from what has now been said, as if the course things take spontaneously were enough, and it were labour lost to urge on a movement that is already rapid enough to be safe. Why hasten a dissolution which we declare to be inevitable and sure? Why trouble men's belief, which is to perish so soon without our aid? Let me answer this question briefly, in conclusion.

The process is not a spontaneous one, and will not

regulate itself. The actual harm done in our view by the maintaining of doctrines virtually outgrown and obsolete, I have insisted on before. Their mischief as a *vis inertiæ* in the way of intellectual and moral force I have just alluded to, as well as the waste of strength and zeal spent in sustaining them. These alone would be reason enough for distinctly and positively opposing them. Controversy is neither useful nor pleasant for its own sake; but it is the appointed and necessary means of something better than itself. Truth and error must be matched and confronted,—set fairly face to face,—or the high purpose and work of truth will be forever unattained. Controversy, then, waged in a sincere and independent way, is not to be regretted, but welcomed as the pioneer of truth and righteousness. "Opinion in good men," says Milton, "is but knowledge in the making." So controversy, with honest men, is but pure religion in the learning.

And finally, though the result may seem sure enough,—the destruction of certain forms of error,—yet it is of infinite consequence what shall come to take their place. The theory of Christianity which we have been examining is certainly destined to a speedy fall. It seems not to have an independent, vigorous life, but rather to be sustained by habit and the dead weight of inert resistance to the assaults of reason. But it has filled a place in the conscience and affection of men, which must not be left empty. That this should perish, and no substitute be found, would be a far greater calamity than that it should exist perpetually. The question before us is, Shall

it be supplanted by a cold negation, or outgrown by a positive, free, and generous faith? It is far easier to pull down than to build up. There may be a time for both; but the time for this last should begin as soon and last as long as possible. To deny is far easier than to affirm, and to some is quite as satisfactory. But there are moral and spiritual wants that must be met. The heart of mankind will for ever hunger and thirst after righteousness, and it must be filled.

With an earnest, reverent, and candid mind, with a willingness to undertake the hard task of unfolding a higher and better system of truth, with a deep consciousness of those religious wants that must be met by a living Christianity, should we lay our hand to this preparatory work of invading the present belief of men. We should not wait for it to be undermined by insidious skepticism, or superseded by barren unbelief. Strongly convinced of the reality of a faith more broad, lofty, and inspiring, and under the impulse of such a faith, should we approach this preliminary work, as a high duty we owe to God and man. We have no right to take it up in a different spirit, or from any other point of view. Whether or not we succeed in making a satisfactory and faultless statement, the attempt is one which we cannot honestly forego,— to anticipate so far as we may the invasions of religious indifference and unbelief; to plead in behalf of what to us is a purer and a better doctrine; and, while contending against all forms of error, to contend more earnestly for "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

DISCOURSE X.

LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY.

WE HAVING THE SAME SPIRIT OF FAITH, ACCORDING AS IT IS WRITTEN, I BELIEVED, AND THEREFORE HAVE I SPOKEN; WE ALSO BELIEVE, AND THEREFORE SPEAK.—2 Cor. iv. 13.

IT is a charge which has often been made upon Unitarians, and with some show of justice, that, while they do their best to weaken men's belief in doctrines generally received, they are not equally earnest, certainly not equally successful, in devising something better to take their place. Their system is said to be one of negations; their doctrine to consist in a denial of others' doctrine; their Christianity to be the remnant, after removing all mystery and solemnity from the venerable belief of the past. Theologically speaking, it has been too often so. The task is certainly more obvious, perhaps easier, to contend against a given form of error, than to develop consistently the opposing truth; and it is not to be wondered at if, to some persons, they seemed to have nothing to offer but a "statement of reasons for not believing" the received dogmas of Orthodoxy.

But a glance will show that this charge rests on mere ignorant prejudice. If Orthodoxy means the

view of Christianity which involves the Trinity and the Vicarious Atonement, Unitarianism is simply the view of Christianity which does not involve these doctrines. So far the statement is doubtless negative. But, for all that appears, one view may be as lofty, positive, and broad as the other. Nay, the doctrine which is denied may be an encumbrance, a limit, a perversion or enfeebling, of the truth; and then what is denial in form is affirmation in fact. It is only to say with Paul, "The word of God is *not bound*." And such, in truth and honesty, I consider the case to be. Setting aside, then, this common prejudice, let us look on one side and on the other, and judge them by their merits.

The several doctrines of Orthodoxy I have regarded as false and injurious interpretations of certain facts in the religious feeling and experience. I have represented them as opposed to and standing in the way of the principles of pure and simple Christianity. What those principles are I have only intimated, not distinctly laid down. I have taken them for granted, rather than given them a formal and systematic exposition. I have assumed the existence of a counter system of religious truth, furnishing the standard which the doctrines under review have been matched against and judged by. I come now to state more distinctly what that system is; or, rather, what the essential principles are that give it its distinctive character. That it is identical with the system taught by Christ, I have rather assumed than positively asserted or maintained by argument. To do away in part the feeling that it is a vague and

negative thing, and to remove misconceptions as to my own meaning and position, I ask your attention to the statement I have now to make.

What I mean by the phrase "Liberal Christianity" is by no means the same thing with the system professed by any church or sect, or received as the acknowledged basis of any denominational union. Statements of belief there may be, sufficiently full and accurate to define the position of an individual, positive enough to make the basis of outward union and co-operation; but no one has a right to take his own, still less that of any body of men, as a sufficient exponent of what we mean by Liberal Christianity. It is rather a set of principles half consciously adopted by men in every sect; the obscure basis of a common hope, zeal, and interest, among all who unite in the great Christian work; a common spirit, dwelling in many forms, found in many places, pervading and harmonizing many various beliefs. It is simply the element of religion and humanity, the essential meaning and motive in the words of Christ, the underlying principle in all sincere and earnest expositions of truth and duty,—only requiring to be more prominently brought forward and more clearly understood, as the sum and substance of Christianity itself.

In the last Discourse, I alluded to some of the signs that many men in every sect are coming more and more to occupy this common ground of a spiritual faith, and to represent this, and not any form of dogmatic opinion, as the essential thing in religion. It would be doing great injustice to put forward the

claim of any sect, as such, to a monopoly of it, or even to a paramount place as its representative. If I have spoken occasionally as a Unitarian, it has not been to disparage the position of others in the movement which I wish to represent. Sincerely thinking, as I do, that the forms of opinion which as Unitarians we oppose are full of harm and error, I by no means consider that as Unitarians we have attained a sufficient knowledge of the truth. At most, we can only clain to be, with others, seekers after truth; occupying in some respects a more favourable position than *we*, at least, could occupy elsewhere, but welcoming most gladly the fellowship and aid of fellow-seekers everywhere. I have endeavoured all along to show how liberal principles are at work in the bosom of every sect; giving more and more the tone to their theology, and leading them to place more stress on the principles of the Christian life than on any theological creed. It is my object now to show more fully what these principles are, and what is the consummation they are leading to.

What I speak of as Liberal Christianity is not the property of any man, or church, or sect, or creed. Any sectarian name would be far too narrow to express its meaning and purpose. In its essential character, some may be nearer to it, and some farther off; but in some degree, greater or less, it is represented in every sect and church. It is a method of understanding and applying the truths of religion wholly different, and proceeding from a different set of principles, and presupposing a radically different view of the Divine government, from that which we

have been considering heretofore. To that theory it is radically opposed, uncompromisingly hostile. And yet I do not apprehend that any single feature in it, rightly stated, will excite alarm and distrust in a large class of those who advocate that theory ever so sincerely. The great difference is, that what to one is only the sentiment of the earnest and thoughtful, the desire and hope of the free-minded, an incident and appendage to the positive declaration of the creed, rather acquiesced in (if thought of at all) than explicitly accepted and avowed, to the other is the main and essential element of Christianity itself.

When we speak of this, we are dealing with fundamental principles, not detailed opinions. It is to very little purpose to inquire, what do Unitarians believe, or what does any man believe. A person's private opinions are in some sense his private property; and it is a barren and impotent curiosity which would pry into them merely for their own sake. We do not wish to dictate our opinions, or take them at any one's else dictation. So far as it seemed desirable, these have been stated or implied all along. But the principles according to which one believes and acts are almost sure to be worth knowing; certainly, if he thinks for himself, and deeply. And these principles, as they apply to and are developed in the liberal faith, are what I would endeavour to set forth at the present time. I do not undertake to give you a system of belief ready made to hand, not even the outline of such a system; but only to say what are the conditions on which it is to be had,

if ever it is to be had,— the method we must follow if we would have any success in seeking it.

I. In doing this, I must take for granted, first, the simple great verities of religion, without which it is not possible so much as to conceive of a system of religious belief at all. What I mean are such truths as these: the being and providence and holy attributes of God, as implied in a Moral Order which is to us the supreme law of life; the freedom and accountability of the human soul; the eternal distinction between right and wrong; the law of moral discipline and retribution; and the spiritual or eternal life of the soul, with whatever of hope or apprehension it may involve. These we must accept beforehand, either as primary truths, ultimate and undeniable,— as much so as the fact of our own existence or that of the natural world,— or else on the strength of some authority that commends itself to our mind.

For myself, I am free to say I think they are above and beyond the sanction of any outward authority, itself requiring to be established by outward proof; that the reason accepts and believes them, as soon as it is in a condition that makes it capable of doing so; that they can only be illustrated and enforced, not their certainty confirmed, by the evidence of external facts; and that the true and only mode of proving them is to educate the mind, morally and intellectually, up to that point where it perceives them to be implied in the moral life itself. Other evidence, historic or philosophical, may be of very great incidental service in that proc-

ess of education, but cannot afford the ultimate and sufficient proof. In the last resort, our assurance is, that "God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit," — whether by direct and express communication, or in the fundamental laws of our intellectual constitution. We ought not, therefore, to make them *of a secondary grade of certainty;* or to allow that, if the force of other evidence is weakened, they are rendered doubtful, and lose their weight and authority to our mind.

Such an admission seems to me alike perilous and incorrect. Religious truth is self-evident in something the same sense with mathematical truth: that is, it stands on its own foundation, and, as soon as properly stated and explained, is seen to express immutable and necessary fact. I may be unable just now to see the truth of or to understand an axiom in algebra, such as those involved in the differential calculus; or in mechanics, such as those respecting hydrostatic pressure and undulatory motion. But, if so, I know the fault is in me, not in the scientific proposition that makes it known to me. To a mind differently trained, it is simple and self-evident. In one sense I may be said to receive it on authority; because I take it for granted, provisionally, in applying to practice the science which I hope one day to master theoretically. So, too, if I cannot just now see intellectually, or understand, the reality of a Divine providence or the spiritual life, I impute it to a defect in my own mind, not to any lack of truth in the doctrine. I am willing, and I am compelled, to take it for granted before the

proof. I know that it answers to the best feelings and aspirations of my nature; that the native and spontaneous belief of mankind, however imperfect, always includes it; that it has been an essential element in the most exalted minds, and the inspiration of all the noblest lives; and I am sure that, as my experience widens and deepens, and my tone of thought is elevated, I shall become more capable of receiving it. The *universal mind* of man, and the highest and purest *individual minds*, repose alike on this primitive conviction. Doubt is a transition state that often intervenes between the two; while belief is the normal condition of the mind, as shown by all the tests which we have a right to apply. And this, it seems to me, is the only sort of authority, or method of proof, that can be safely employed in regard to the fundamental truths of religion. It is not outward, but inward; not scientific or historic, but spiritual.

But, whether from inward persuasion or from outward evidence or authority we accept that order of truth, it is equally certain that it must be presupposed, as the foundation of any system of religious belief. And for our present purpose (which is to illustrate the principles of a *Christian* system), I presuppose the same as to the facts of historical Christianity recorded in the New Testament. I do not enter for the present into any controversy as to their interpretation, or the precise nature of their authority; but it is impossible not to perceive their immense value and importance in a religious point of view. Religion is wholly another thing to us from

the existence of these writings, from the history indissolubly bound up with them, and from the reverence with which they are all but universally regarded. The character and tender providence of God are here revealed to us, as they are nowhere else so clearly, through the life and ministrations of Christ. We feebly acknowledge our debt to him, by naming our highest thought and purest morality after his name. Sharing in that mighty religious movement which began with him, we have no wish to disparage the paramount and peculiar claims of the Christian gospels, however much we may seem to some lax in our criticism, or dangerous in our interpretation. We may receive them as explicit proof, or as the fitting illustration, of the religious truths spoken of before. We may take them word for word as the Evangelists have delivered them, or make qualifications and abatements, according to our convictions as to the nature of historical evidence and the credibility of what is supernatural. All this does not affect our sincere veneration for these books, or their practical worth to us. Our faith in God and faith in Christ belong close together. We differ from others not as to the reality, but as to the quality, of that faith. And, going no farther than the plain moral and religious signification of the life of Christ, together with its obvious and incalculable influence on the life and thought of men, we find abundantly enough to command our reverence, and to serve as the basis and the key to our whole system of religious thought.

Let us now briefly consider the important conse-

quences to life and character which result from accepting these simplest principles of faith,— these most general statements of spiritual truth.

First, their value as *religious* truth, in the appropriate sphere of the religious emotion and experience. If they are held as theory or doctrine merely, they will be barren and worthless. I do not say one doctrine is as good as another, till each is carried to its proper result in practice; because we can never trace the secret operation of truth or falsehood upon the soul. But it is by no means to content ourselves with an accurate theory that we should seek and cherish truth. Its nature is too grave and earnest for such an intellectual play as that. If right and genuine, its nature is to be a living and a working force. And for this and other reasons it is that I think we should not spend the energy of our mind in seeking to establish, by laborious argument, those primary truths which must, after all, be taken for granted as antecedent to any method or detail of proof, if we would make them of any worth to us. To speculate about them is the appropriate work of the mind, doubtless, in a certain stage of growth; but the sooner it outgrows that stage by taking these things for granted, the better for its health and strength.

They are valuable for their practical and essential use,— for that, in other words, which follows from the fact of their being religious truth. They brace and expand the mind. They lead to moral energy and earnest work. They calm men's apprehension of the future, and make them capable of gratitude

for the past. They widen the circle of human companionship and love, uniting strangers in a common hope, and making the dearest fellowship of friends. They shed upon the ordinary places of human life a light from above, clear and celestial; ennobling the lowest occupation, and leading the mind everywhere to repose in God. They are the solace of grief, the strength of the lonely, the security against temptation, the prevailing power over sin, the blessing and glory of the mind that puts trust in them. They bring together, in the compass of one magnificent and holy thought, the grandeur of the universe, the dignity of the soul, the sacredness of life, the glory of immortal hope, and the perpetual enfolding love of God. All this is but part of the native power and efficacy of that order of religious truth, when sincerely received, and made habitual to the mind. In strictness of speech its value is infinite,— not to be measured or defined by the standard of any thing alien from itself. In the language of the Proverbs, "its price is above rubies, and all the precious things thou canst desire are not to be compared with it."

And again, this spiritual faith has its meaning, which the intellect is to interpret and apprehend. Experience and observation, refined and elaborated by patient thought, will bring us rich material, to be embodied in our faith and spiritualized by its contact. Honestly, clearly, and consistently, the mind must work upon the facts of our inward life, to see them in their right religious meaning. Whatever interpretation we give to the origin of Christianity,—

whether we suppose, with some, that it was the descent of the living God in human form, or the word of a miraculously vouched and authenticated messenger, or simply the profound and intense conviction of the man Jesus himself, calling forth in response that wonderful tide of religious life and undoubting faith that flowed deep and strong through the early ages of the Church, and so has come to us,— whatever origin we assign to the fact, the fact itself remains. Christianity has brought us objects of intellectual apprehension and belief. It offers us material of thought, rich without example. It reveals to us by its burning and shining light something in the depth of our soul of faculty and capacity and emotion, something of the broad compass of duty, something of the grandeur of moral heroism and the awful beauty of holiness, something of the spiritual nature and destination of the soul, which without it, or something like it, we should have never dreamed. It does shed a ray, broad and clear, upon the path behind us of our past experience, and upon the path before us of coming duty and coming pain. All this Christianity as a power in human life has done for us, interpret it how we can and will. So much it offers for food to the free and thinking mind. The gift should be improved, the talent employed. The very capacity of thought, to one who thinks, is reason enough why the thought should be trained and used. For "the light we have gained," says Milton, "was not given us to be ever staring on; but by it to discover onward things more remote from our knowledge."

We need have no jealousy of the freest activity of human reason. Christianity does not ask to live by sufferance. The free thought, like the willing conscience, is its natural ally. Human error, like human sinfulness, is the material it is commissioned to work upon. So far from making Christianity succumb, or seek another province, or contend uselessly with the world's increasing knowledge, we rather need an interpretation of it equal to the intellectual needs and advancement of an intellectual time. We need an idea of it equal to the highest thought and the intensest life of our own day. There are deep mental and moral wants, which it is called alike to meet. And as, unquestionably, the two intellectual characteristics of our age are freedom and science,—freedom in politics, society, and opinion; science embracing daily more and more of the boundless range of the entire universe,—so we undoubtedly, if Christianity is still to be held and cherished, need a statement of it broad and generous and deep and liberal enough to command the respect and to win the love of this all-questioning and turbulent age.

Again, the moral aim and purpose of Christianity. Its work is not only to expand the mind, and lead the heart to repose in God, but to quicken and elevate the sense of duty. Conscience, as it judges and acts on all things, must be disciplined and trained in faith. It will neither give nor accept a lower law than the gospel rule, *Be ye perfect.* This of itself opens an unmeasured field of moral growth and personal obligation.

And as in the single heart of man, so in the wide

world of man, the Christian thought of excellence must gain and grow. With even and inexorable tread that moral idea advances, heralding the moral action that shall surely come eventually to occupy its ground. We cannot escape, any more in the wider general relations we hold to other men and the world at large than in the conduct of our individual life,—we cannot escape the judgment of a conscience enlightened by the progress of Christian truth. The old coroner's verdict, "Death by act of God," does not abide the investigation of modern physiology, which pries into the modes and operations of organic nature, and assumes the infringement of some organic law. The ancient self-satisfied phraseology—famine, misery, oppression, crime, "by act of God"—does not abide the stern scrutiny of Christian ethics, which investigates the operations of man's moral nature, and assumes the infringement of some organic social law. In appealing tones, out of the wretchedness, starvation, and bloodshed that afflict a guilty world, does the cry of the human heart come to our ears. In former times men forgot or heeded not that voice, so pleading. They cannot so forget or slight it any more. What has once come in living tones, and reached the public conscience, will echo there for ever. The ground it has once come to occupy, it never surrenders.

Terrible questions, as some may think, have been already put to the mind of our age. Yet no question put in the name of justice and right is half so terrible as the bald, unquestioned fact of public wrong; half

so terrible as the blank silence that formerly brooded over the desolation caused by the passion and violence that ravaged the bountiful, glad earth. All the effort, all the aim rather than accomplishment of a better social justice, is but the inevitable result of the existence of Christianity in the world. It is but the mark of the irresistible advance of the tide of human thought. It is but the very prophetic words of Christ, of the Jewish prophet centuries before his day, struggling towards fulfilment: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." God be thanked, that, in the slow advance of human thought, inspired by that prophetic voice, some men have already come so far as to pray and strive and hope for a more literal fulfilment of his words than any but the sacred speaker himself dreamed of when he uttered them!

II. Having thus briefly hinted what we mean when we speak of a system of Liberal Christianity, — namely, the primary religious truth, or foundation of faith, with its application to the spheres of religious experience, intellect, and personal as well as general morality,— I ask your attention while we look back for a moment upon the ground over which we have passed.

It seems to me that, frankly accepting the principles which have been laid down, we stand in a position peculiarly favourable to the fulfilment of the

high purpose of such a faith. Theologically speaking, we have often been considered, and too often suffered ourselves to be regarded, as standing only in a negative position: that is to say, we have been known only as denying, one after another, doctrines insisted on as absolutely essential, and by some held very sacred and dear, among other sects of Christians. The Trinity, so long the object and the symbol of the chiefest reverence paid to any thing by the homage of the world, we begin by sweeping utterly away; so far as we are able, upturning every step of the foundation it was supposed to rest on; taking our very name, some of us, from our unqualified denial of it. The Atonement, corner-stone of so many fabrics of faith, the strong and sure repose of many a devout heart, the key that seemed to unriddle the great mystery of man's life and God's government,— this, too, we assault, refuse, and do our best to overthrow. From the obscure yet venerated dogmas of election, free grace, predestination, regeneration, and spiritual influence, we strip the veil of mystery, seeking to reduce them, if possible, within the range of human philosophy and human science. We go still farther; and, passing the awful shadows of the tomb, strive to dispel the vague terror that hung over the destiny of spirits departed, and to carry there the same law of moral and spiritual growth which we find prevailing here.

With a bold and unsparing hand we have invaded the time-hallowed shrines of ancient faith. We have carried free religious inquiry to its last limits; refusing to believe without a reason rendered why and

how; becoming Protestants of the Protestants, as Paul was at first a Hebrew of the Hebrews; not stopping, some of us, till, in the view of some who watched our course with no unfriendly eye, we seemed to have torn down the last barrier that old reverence had left standing, and to have compromised the very integrity of our faith in the providence of God. The external coverings and supports by which that faith was once held in and sheltered have fallen, one by one, before the attack of men's restless intellect. Verbal inspiration, and prophecy, and miracle have been successively abandoned by many, who asserted that they had no need of such defences and allies to their more refined and spiritual apprehension of truth. And no wonder, considering the disjointed and chaotic state of religious opinion everywhere, that the Roman Catholic begins to ask, What do you Protestants believe? and every sect asks in turn, What do you Unitarians believe?

In answer to this question, I say, without the smallest scruple or hesitation, that we have the materials for a system of religious faith beyond all comparison the most rich, complete, broad, lofty, and inspiring that the world has ever known. We do ourselves wrong, we do wrong to the cause of truth and liberal thought, when we suffer it to be said that our creed is mainly negative, that our doctrines are made up of the denial of others' doctrines. It is not so. Our principles of belief, if we rightly understand them, are most positive and explicit. The whole world of language, the whole realm of human thought, would scarce suffice to comprehend our sim-

plest propositions, together with the infinity of results, illustrations, applications, hopes, and motives that belong to them. If we understand ourselves in our controversy with others' theology, we are only trying to remove the limitations and bounds that hamper, belittle, restrain the free movement of our mind towards God. It is not that we refuse or deny the spiritual fact contained, for instance, in statements of the divinity of Christ, the redemption and reconciliation of men's souls in faith, the awful discipline and retribution that attend on human character; but because we cannot consent to be limited and confined by the boundaries men have drawn about these sacred subjects, reducing them within grasp and compass of the subtile understanding, or making them convenient tools for religious machinery and spiritual despotism. We do not deny the interior fact, the sacred personal signification of religious truth, however much we may wish the mind emancipated from some of its present forms.

A doctrinal reformation, or religious revolution, has been defined as the falling back upon the experience of the soul, and making the personal element the test and the dominant thing in our religious theory. We must have faith in the operations of man's moral and religious nature. We must have that primary and essential trust in the human soul. As asserted by Luther, it made the doctrine of *salvation by faith*, the watchword of the Reformation; as stated by Des Cartes, it made the starting-point of modern speculative philosophy; and in the last analysis it must form the resting-place of all our re-

ligious thought. Without it, we are all afloat and astray. Without it, we cannot trust a single intellectual process, or moral conviction, or course of religious argument: there is no reliance anywhere. Without it, all the institutions, and creeds, and dogmas, and disciplines, and theologies, and confessions of faith that can possibly be fabricated are but so much clumsy and frail machinery. We may contend, if we choose, like the Church of Rome (which does it consistently), that our hierarchy is divinely appointed, and that a miraculous virtue resides in every hallowed rite, and symbolic act, and priestly word; but on any other than this absolute and high-handed assumption there is no ultimate reliance, save in the integrity of the soul of man, under the control of laws appointed in its constitution, and executed under the universal providence of God.

There is absolutely no middle ground between these two. Either our church is a separate, divinely established thing, and its simplest acts are miracles, and its simplest words are oracles or spells, and a bound utterly peculiar and not to be crossed sets it apart from everything human and profane; or else, whatever divine elements of truth be intermixed, the creed, the opinion, the form, the external rite or institution, is simply human, and depends, not on any special sanctity of its own, but on the integrity and good faith of the human hands that sustain it, the human minds that give credence to it, the human souls whose conscious want it satisfies.

Of these two extreme positions, we have chosen the latter for our own: not necessarily cutting our-

selves off from the forms of faith or worship, or the particular opinions either, that belong to other times and creeds; but accepting what we do accept, and denying what we do deny, on grounds utterly different from those urged by church authority or priestly discipline. Our Christianity we take because it comes home to our own experience; and we take it in such form as comes home to our own experience. It is the great field of man's spiritual history and life from which we gather the materials to build the structure of our faith. Scripture may give the key, the life of Christ may give the pattern, his death may give the solemn motive, his promise may give the firm assurance with which we look forward to eternity, and his resurrection our confiding and triumphant hope. But all these do not give the lines and limits; they do not mark the boundaries of the active intellect; they do not show where the mind's range and expansiveness shall find a check. Rather, they give strength and impulse to the free motion of the mind. They give encouragement and vigour to

> This intellectual being,
> These thoughts that wander through eternity.

They arm us with new instruments, and put us on a new course, and give a new spirit to enlighten us, in our discovery of truth. So let us welcome the free and inspiring, and not slavish, reliance upon the Oracles of Truth!

What we have continually to take note of, in making application of the principles before asserted,

is that there are very various types of intellectual and religious character. Each one has his own; and it is by being strictly faithful to his own that each one is to find satisfaction. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit; and there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all." We have no reason to be afraid of the largest liberty and the extremest diversity. The only real cause for fear is lest the efforts made to hamper this liberty, to render uniform this diversity, should result in distortion and disease of the religious sentiment, or else in giving rise to strange and fantastic forms of false, imaginary independence. What are the nations where religion seems to be at the lowest ebb? Precisely the ones where enthusiasm heretofore has been most rampant, where discipline has been most intolerant, where priesthoods have exercised strictest sway over the operations of intellect and modes of worship, and where the strong hand of civil power has most relentlessly enforced degrees dictated by the strong will of hierarchical rule.

We need no such ungenerous and cowardly methods to sustain our religious faith, no such controlling guidance in our search for religious truth.

First for the faith. It springs up, spontaneous and irrepressible, in the human soul. There never was a period, probably there never was a man, of tolerably free and healthy activity of intellect, that did not show, too, abundant signs of some type of religion. That is what we mean when we speak of man's re-

ligious nature. The utmost that could possibly be accomplished, in the most radical and sweeping revolution we can in any way conceive, would be a change analogous to that which geologists tell us has once and again and a hundred times laid waste the fair and teeming surface of the earth. The inexhaustible fertility of nature triumphs over the smouldering and shapeless chaos. New forms of bird and beast and creeping thing, new and statelier growth of forest and grove, new wealth and more abundant beauty, are the result that comes to pass in the bounteous providence of God. And so in the processes of human thought. Far be it from any of us to desire a wild crusade against every form of opinion, to cut loose from all the moorings and anchorage of the past, to engage in fanatic devastation of all that men count holy. But as a point of religious faith we hold it sure, and the past history of man confirms in us the belief, that the destruction of one mode or fabric of thought is but to prepare for another; that nothing whatever can permanently derange or stop the expansion of man's knowledge, or quell his search for truth; that, though the night of seeming unbelief be long and dark to us, yet in the eye of Him to whom "a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night," the soul lives, the heart beats, the dawn of a brighter day is coming, humanity is preparing a richer and better offering to lay hereafter at the footstool of the Universal Father.

"When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Yes! Faith is the imperish-

able, the everlasting possession of the human heart, — the Divinely established bond which unites man's highest thought, his truest freedom, his most exalted moral heroism, with that God whose fulness is the source of all. The forms of it may vary; its essence remains the same. As it was in the beginning, when in the childhood of the human race men looked out on the young earth teeming with beauty, and with awe-struck gaze beheld the naked heaven, "the inverted hand of God," above them,— as it was in times of fierce commotion and disaster, when the only solace was in the childlike confidence with which the martyr's pious heart could whisper "My Father!" — as it was in the age of implicit and unquestioning adoration, when painting, and poetry, and loftiest cathedral pinnacle or vault, and the solemn strains of the chanted mass, were but the impassioned utterance of the upward-striving soul,— so is it now, after so many a weary struggle after truth, after so many veils removed, one by one, from Nature's mysteries; now, when so many forms, once hallowed, are looked on but as unmeaning shapes, husks with the kernel gone; now, after so many a battle for the right, and the slow evolution of principles of justice and abstract moral truth, taking place at length as the criterion by which men's conduct and their institutions too must be judged,— now and for ever, in its essential quality, does man's religious faith remain the same.

And, lastly, the materials and illustrations by which we are to realize this faith. They are provided in rich abundance; they lie strown thick everywhere.

That glory displayed in the deep heaven above us, sparkling in starry splendour, as its glittering constellations and dusky nebulæ show the enormous scale of that which we call the Divine Order of the Universe; whatever we see on the diversified and fertile surface of the earth, as its hill-sides teem with vegetation, and its forests wear their garb of varied green, and its flowers bloom in profuse, countless variety, and its mountain-ranges lift their eternal peaks into the dark sky, rosy with dawn or evening twilight, or flashing like a kindled altar at the approach of day; whatever we hear in the perpetual melody of nature, in the wood-bird's song, or the roar of waterfall, or whispering wind through forest aisles, or dash of rivulet, or ocean's stormy voice, or peal of thunder from rolling and gusty clouds; whatever we read "in the marvellous heart of man, that strange and mystic scroll," bearing record of past joys and pains and present hope, bounding to the voice of love, trembling beneath the flood of gladness or fear, quick to feel the burden of life's care, warm at the breath of sympathy, and yearning wistfully towards the unfathomable secrets of futurity; whatever we find, too, in the deeper soul of man, obscurely yet solemnly conscious of an impending eternity of duration, swelling with hopes not earthly, sustained by faith direct from heaven, shrinking before the awful presence of holiness, yet inspired by its invigorating touch, capable of an angel's bliss or a demon's woe,—all, all are the source and illustration of our faith; from all we would gather wisdom; to all we would listen reverently, as to the very voice of God.

Is it asked where we shall find material for our religious belief, now that we have lost our confidence in the literal and infallible inspiration of the record which contains the lives and thoughts of so many good and holy men,— which embodies to us, too, the divine words and diviner life of him whom men have loved to call the Saviour of the world? Behold, we answer, the Universe is our school, and the eternal Word is our teacher, and Life is our interpreter. We refuse not to others the form they find good for themselves. We deny not to others the more spiritual faith they seek,— the reality of their heart's experience, the measure of truth contained in their more airy and imaginative forms of thought. But for ourselves we accept no pledges, and bind ourselves by no bonds. Let our spirit be earnest, our intention sincere, we trust the good God, to whom alone we are accountable. Free and strong as the wing of the bird of heaven, reverent and gentle as the spirit of a child at prayer, should be the action of our mind when following the infinite topics of thought suggested as the subject-matter of our faith. Diversities of operations there will be and must be. God hath ordained it so. He never meant we should be uniformed and liveried in our service of truth. Rather does he bid welcome to every free and earnest mind, promising to redeem it in his own good time from sin and error, that wandering man may be restored to those "everlasting habitations," where He shall be all in all!

THE END.

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